University of Alberta

The Lifeworld of the University Athlete and Considerations of Quality of Life

By

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts

Department of Physical Education and Sport Studies

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE LIFEWORLD OF THE UNIVERSITY ATHLETE AND CONSIDERATIONS OF QUALITY OF LIFE submitted by KIM SENECAL in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of MASTERS OF ARTS.

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Dedication

For Mom and Dad. You may not believe it, but you've inspired me for many years. So much of you is in me. You've modelled a way to live for a long time. I want you both to know that I love you and respect you for letting me be me. You did a good job. This is for you. Maybe you'll even read it someday. Thanks for everything. I know you're wondering when I'll be getting on with things and to be honest, I just don't know. So here's to the most important thing, being happy.

Abstract

Phenomenological design was used to gain an understanding of the lived physical activity experiences of university athletes and how the meaning of these experiences relate to quality of life. A narrative was created from formal interviews (both semi-structured and unstructured), informal interviews, and reflections. The narrative explores themes in the lifeworld of university athletes within the context of a story following the athletes over the course of a single season. The importance of flow, meaning, balance, and freedom to the concept of quality of life and future research directions are examined. This research attempted to address the lack of experiential studies giving voice to athletes regarding sporting experiences and quality of life. Future implications suggest that examining experience from a phenomenological perspective could be useful in understanding quality of life and may be useful for coaches, teachers, and athletes.

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I would like to express my thanks to those who have made this effort possible while recognizing the danger of saying too much or too little. I hope you all know how important you are to me even if I don't say everything I could.

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CHAPTER I

THE LIFEWORLD OF THE UNIVERSITY ATHLETE AND CONSIDERATIONS OF QUALITY OF LIFE: AN INTRODUCTION

Some of my most enjoyable and memorable life moments have involved experiencing physical activity. I remember many afternoons spent running around our neighbourhood inventing games, playing ball, or jumping on my friend's trampoline. On cold winter days or warm summer nights we would organize ourselves into armies and play various wargames. By far the most enjoyable activity I took part in was street hockey. On many cold afternoons I could be found with my friends in the middle of the street with our makeshift nets. We'd split into teams, being careful to make the squads even so we could have better games. We'd change the rules, making the game harder or easier depending on the situation. We'd play until we were frozen or exhausted, taking only small breaks to warm up or eat and then we'd hit the street again. Many nights were spent outside shooting at the net or playing with the younger kids on my street. Sometimes their parents would come out and we'd have a skills challenge. We would have a shoot out, seeing who could score the most goals in ten shots on the goalie.

I enjoyed the challenge of these experiences. I enjoyed being outside. Mostly I loved the experience of movement, seeing what my body was capable of, pushing the limits of my abilities, creating new moves, and enjoying my interaction with teammates and opponents. Each experience of ball hockey was unique, it was still hockey, but we would adjust the rules as we saw fit to make the event more enjoyable. All of these activities fuelled my desire for taking part in games of movement and activities that I could share with other people.

My involvement in organized sport began, as with many Canadian kids, playing ice hockey. Being on the ice was a completely different bodily experience from street hockey. It was like flying; smooth, graceful and powerful. I loved skating, I loved being on a team, I loved travelling to different towns, and I made many strong friendships. I competed for seven years. Ice hockey, for the most part, was an enjoyable experience.

However, hockey slowly changed as I grew older. The politics became more obvious in selection for teams. Time demands were more stringent. Competition amongst players intensified. Winning became the only goal in playing and friendships strained with the pressures of performing. I was no longer the littlę kid enjoying movement and friendships. I was becoming more and more a number in the game of organized hockey.

One of my most powerful sporting memories occurred in my second last year of hockey. My family had returned from Christmas break in Saskatchewan. On the way home we stopped at the rink to try and make a league game our team was playing. At that time my brother and I were playing on the same team. We missed the game but the coach told me to show up the next day for a game we were playing out of town. So the next day my brother and I got our equipment and walked to the rink. When we got there we found out the game was an all-star game. All the best players from our league were playing and I had been selected to the West team. It had not been intended for my brother to play and the coaches told him in not so many words. I was devastated, more so than my brother. He was hurt but he just turned around and walked home. I stood there stunned. I felt horrible for my brother, how could he have felt? Why couldn't he play? Why hadn't our coach told me this the day before? While the coaches were loading the vehicles, I managed to sneak out and hide in a nearby park. I hid and cried while they searched for me. Finally they left and I walked home. That day left a bitter taste in my mouth for the world of organized hockey. Ultimately I left the game.

I quit hockey but I still wanted to take part in organized sport. I was a skilled athlete and had been encouraged by my physical education teachers to join the school programs for a couple of years. So I began my junior-senior high school athletic experience. I competed in volleyball, badminton, basketball, and track and field. My memories are mostly positive. I enjoyed many aspects of playing and being part of a team, but some things disturbed me. In particular, are vivid memories of getting whipped by a considerably larger and more talented school in basketball. Their coach had decided that running the score would be fun sport, in the end we lost by nearly a hundred points. Our team went through a lot of negative emotions that day. Not one of my better sporting

moments.

For the most part my involvement in sport has improved my life experience. I have had many opportunities and many fond memories. I was fortunate enough to have played a number of competitive sports in high school and in community leagues during university. Playing has led to helping others try to move toward their unique potentials as a coach and through my studies in sport psychology. I have tried to make physical activity a life long pursuit. I enjoy the experiences I have had in sport, particularly the social bonds I have developed and the intense satisfaction I achieve through movement. Sport will always be a part of my life.

Need for the Study

Our generation, as those before, has assumed a demeanour of technological superiority. We perceive this era as the zenith of civilization. We live far longer than our ancestors. Medical technologies control previously deadly epidemics. Modern agricultural methods have improved the quality and quantity of available foods. We can travel the globe with speed and comfort in hours. Technologies allow us to communicate instantly with people on the other side of the world. We can access mountainous libraries of information with the press of a fingertip. Entertainment options from computers, television, books, radio, sports and recreation far outnumber our capacity for involvement. Yet, beyond these modern tools we are probably not that different from our ancestors. We may be the master of new technologies, but we are still striving to find happiness through our experiences, to improve the quality of our lives. With the approach of the 21st century there has been a shift in Western thought from product orientation toward an increasing awareness of a more holistic, process oriented vision of human experience. Book stores are filled with the latest self help guides to improving our quality of life. Quality of life is a term heard throughout educational circles, the healthcare system, and in the media. We are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of the quality of our lives. It seems that at every level of society we are concerned with improving quality of life.

Even with the growing prominence of quality of life as a concept in society the

question arises, why examine quality of life in the sporting context? Sport maintains a prominent place in the current global culture. Involvement in sport exists for almost all age groups and competitive levels across cultures. A quick glimpse of the print and television media reveals the importance of sport in society. Extensive coverage of professional leagues and major sporting spectacles such as the Olympic games often dominate the world media. Sport, at these levels is a big money machine. At lesser levels, sport is promoted as a means of developing strong character, work habits, and social skills. However, in recent years many of the values and benefits of sport involvement have been questioned. Problems of power, health, and enjoyment are only a few of the issues being raised regarding the benefits of sport. Many questions remain unanswered, these questions and the prominence of sport suggest a need to examine quality of life in the sport context.

University athletics is no exception to the issues surrounding sport involvement. General perceptions suggest that athletes have it made. Many stereotypes exist extolling the lifestyle of the university athlete; good times, easy classes, scholarships, prestige and many other benefits are associated with university sport. Many of these stereotypes are based on the American college system where athletics is big business, but this trend is starting in Canada. There has recently been talk of creating an independent Canadian athletics organization and creating larger scholarships to keep top Canadian athletes from attending school in the States (Deacon, 1997). Keeping top Canadian athletes in Canadian schools will increase athletics revenues, improve the quality of competition, and generate prestige for schools (Deacon, 1997). Yet, little, if anything has been mentioned about the benefits to the athletes. What of the athlete's experience? The contradictions and debate surrounding university sport creates a need to examine quality of life and individual experience in the university setting.

My studies in sport psychology have led to my focus on quality of life. I began my studies with a strong interest in helping others develop human potential, within sport and without. Yet, my experience has shown that most of sport psychology has been directed at elite performers achieving faster, higher, and stronger results. Most

applications of sport psychology principles regard the athlete as a performance machine; to be tinkered with until the perfect performance can be attained. Achieving a winning performance has overwhelmed the importance of the individual. A quick look at the sport psychology literature reveals that little regard, if any, has been given the consequences of elite performance and training. What are the implications to individuals of being so singularly focused? What are they experiencing? It would seem that winning the gold justifies any consequences.

The glory associated with elite sport seems to have dulled the various potential alternative applications of sport psychology concepts. Much of what is done in sport psychology can have a positive influence on the overall development of a person, however this potential has been relatively ignored. What of applications for less skilled performers? When will we consider how we live and pursue our goals rather than the results? I firmly believe that by concentrating on the process of how we live, the outcome will be successful. Although I am interested in performance enhancement, I see it as only one aspect in the overall development of an individual. My major focus in sport psychology is to help people develop all aspects of their person, to develop in a holistic fashion.

My choice to examine quality of life and the experience of physical activity in university athletics has also been influenced by circumstance. Working on this project was an opportunity to determine if I wanted to work with elite athletes in the future. Chances to work with elite athletes are rare and I was fortunate enough to have access, through various contacts, to these athletes. Furthermore, my preoccupation with quality of life is a natural extension of my interest in helping people and my struggle to improve my own life. In many ways, this research is an attempt to make sense of my own experiences and improve the quality of my own life.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to formulate a description of the lived experience of individuals involved in the physical activity domain of elite sport and to ascertain the meanings these activities have for quality of life. The study was conducted with

individuals from elite sport teams in the university setting. The intent of the study was to gain an understanding of human experience via phenomenological design. In the early stages of the study, quality of life was generally understood as a sense of balance between physical, mental, social, and spiritual needs of the individual (Covey, 1994) as well as balance between ability and challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). It is important to realize that the athletes who participated in this study were encouraged to formulate and describe their own experience of physical activity and relate it to their quality of life. The following two research questions addressed the overall focus of the study. How is physical activity in university sport experienced? And second, how is this experience related to quality of life of the individual?

CHAPTER II
EXPLORING THE LITERATURE

A large number of claims have been made regarding the relationship between quality of life and physical activity. It has generally been assumed that involvement in physical activity, particularly organized sport, will lead to mental engagement as well as social (Devereux, 1976; McPherson & Brown, 1988) and moral development (Hall, Slack, Smith, & Whitson, 1991). It has been suggested that involvement in certain types of physical activity can enhance skill learning, spirituality, and the quality of everyday life (Leonard, 1974; Millman 1979).

Physical educators, health officials, and researchers have long made the link between good health, quality of life and involvement in physical activity (Bouchard, Shepard, Stephens, Sutton, & McPherson, 1990; Hall, Slack, Smith, & Whitson, 1991). There are volumes of studies showing the health benefits of maintaining regular physical activity (Blair, 1995; Leon & Norstrom, 1995;Wood, 1994). For example, physical health related quality of life improved in previously sedentary older adults after engaging in a regular exercise program (Stewart, King, & Haskell, 1993).

Studies have also attempted to show the connection between psychological benefits and physical activity such as improved self-esteem and image (Berger, 1996; Bouchard, Shepard, Stephens, Sutton, & McPherson, 1990; Morgan & Goldston,1987). Specifically, habitual exercise has been associated with enhanced psychological well-being such as decreases in anxiety and depression in psychiatric populations and as a stress reduction approach to help reduce anxiety, tension, depression and anger (Berger & McInman,1993). Regular exercisers have been found to have more positive self-concepts and higher self-esteem than sedentary individuals (Berger & McInman, 1993). Physical activity has also been shown to have positive short-term changes in mood resulting in decreased anxiety, depression, and fatigue as well as improved alertness, and energy (Berger & McInman, 1993; King, Taylor, & Haskell, 1993; Morgan &Goldston, 1987).

The growing importance of the quality of life concept was reflected in the theme

of the 1995 American Academy of Kinesiology and Physical Education meetings, "Quality of Life: Through Movement, Health, and Fitness." Quality of life has become an important term in the nineties, not only in physical education, but in other fields of study, particularly health related fields. However, the term "quality of life" has created some confusion. Berger (1993) has suggested that the measures of quality of life are as varied as the definitions. Quality of life has been defined as the ability to expand options and increase our capability to experience our full potential (Harris, 1996). Similar to Harris's definition, is quality of life as the ability to pursue enriching, stimulating, and healthy activities (Singer, 1996). Gadamer (1996) suggested that the term quality of life reflects a human recognition of the need to lead our own lives. Covey (1994) described quality of life as the result of balance between four basic human needs: mental, physical, spiritual and social. An imbalance in these needs will result in the lowering of quality of life. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) examined quality of life from the perspective of flow experiences. Flow refers to the experience of balance between an individual's challenges and capacities. When capacities exceed the challenges facing an individual he or she becomes bored, thus the experience of quality of life is constrained. When capacities for action outweigh the challenges an individual faces he or she suffers anxiety, again the experience of quality of life is constrained. Only when our capacities are equal to the challenges do we achieve flow, a high quality of life experience. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) suggested that the quality of our life experiences directly results from our ability to achieve flow states. In health circles, quality of life has primarily focused on health outcomes measured according to functionality, lifespan, and the absence of illness. Quality-adjusted life years has been used to define quality of life according to an index assigned to the number of years lived (Shepard, 1996). Other health related quality of life definitions have typically measured the functionality of patients with disease, on long-term medication or in recovery (Hillers et al., 1994; Mackeigan & Pathak, 1992; Oldridge et al., 1991; Padilla, 1992).

The multitude of definitions of quality of life creates difficulties when trying to study the topic. There is a growing recognition within the health field that quality of life

has become an ambiguous term due to inconsistencies in definitions and measurement (Gill & Feinstein, 1994; McSweeney & Creer, 1995; Moore, Newsome, Payne & Tiansawad, 1993). In one study, 75 papers in the medical literature were reviewed on quality of life. None of these articles distinguished between overall quality of life and health related quality of life. Even more significantly, only 15% of these articles even attempted to define quality of life (Gill & Fienstein, 1994). The fundamental issue is not how correct a definition is, but what purpose does a definition serve and how does it provide meaning (Postman, 1995). Asserting a unitary and a priori definition does not then seem to advance the purpose of studying quality of life.

Perhaps even more alarming than the abundance of quality of life definitions is the limited focus of recent research. Studies have been conceptually driven and outcome oriented relying heavily on surveys, questionnaires and scales. Almost all research has attempted to define quality of life and then measure pre-determined variables, whether they be health, age, fitness, well-being etc., and from these findings make claims stating a person's degree of quality life. Minimal effort has focused on listening to the voice of the individual through direct interviewing. Several researchers have recognized this bias and have proposed the examination of quality of life from a personal perspective. Wrisberg (1996) has suggested that quality of life must include the interpretation of the individual. Gill and Feinstein (1994) claimed that quality of life is a very personal construct and that any attempt to examine it can only be done by listening to an individual's opinion about his/her life experience. It would appear that quality of life is a very individual perception, yet research on quality of life has been very compartmentalized. Research to date has addressed only small aspects of what might be considered components of quality of life (ie. fitness, functionality, lifespan). Little research has focused on something of extreme importance to quality of life, the experiences of the individual.

I am aware of only two studies that have attempted to describe the actual experience of physical activity and relate it to quality of life. Specifically, these studies have attended to the experiences of elite athletes. Wrisberg (1996) took survey responses and anecdotes from earlier NCAA studies on the quality of life for male and female

athletes. He concluded that quality of life for elite amateur athletes was not very high. Instances of injury, pressure, time demands, social seclusion, abusive coaching and struggles for respect and power seemed to dominate these athletes' lives. Quality of life was indirectly approached by Denison (1996) in his narrative examining retirement issues for elite New Zealand athletes. More importantly his study was an attempt to address calls for research using fiction, drama, and poetry to convey lived experiences. It is apparent that current research has not yet fully explored the experience of physical activity on overall perceptions of quality of life; research must focus on the direct experience of the individual.

Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) work further supports the need for research on physical activity and quality of life based on experience. He described the importance of the body for the experience of flow. Humans experience through sight, sound, touch, and taste. He emphasized that without the body ". . . there would be no experiences, and therefore no record of life as we know it" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 95). The ability to experience through the body precedes the ability to achieve flow states. Bodily experiences are the basis of flow states. Activities as complex as yoga, martial arts, and playing music are comparable to simple pursuits like walking to improve quality of life and achieve flow. Although these activities arise from the body, Csikszentmihalyi proposed that they are accompanied by the mind. Flow will not occur without attention, concentration, and discipline, all products of an engaged mind. The importance Csikszentmihalyi (1990) placed on the body for the experience of flow may provide valuable insights for researching quality of life through the experience of physical activity.

Summary

It would seem that the growing concern with quality of life issues has raised a need for educators and health promoters to understand how the experience of physical activity contributes to quality of life. The individual nature of quality of life and the ambiguity of current definitions supports the need for a more holistic research approach. In order to promote physical activity as a means of improving overall quality of life, it is

important that educators are aware of how we experience physical activity. Research should no longer rely only on preconceived, theoretical means of examining and defining quality of life, it will benefit from an exploration of the experiential. Although quality of life is a concept, research should not ignore the role of experience in arriving at an understanding of quality of life. It is important to understand the meanings physical activity experiences create for quality of life conceptions. It should no longer be assumed that involvement in physical activity automatically enhances the overall quality of an individual's life. We need to understand how other aspects of our lives, social, mental and spiritual, are experienced as a result of physical activity. It is important to promote questions that are phenomenological in nature. In other words, what is the experience of physical activity and how does it contribute to our perceptions of quality of life? Coupled with the lack of experiential studies it would seem that now is the time to engage in a study from a phenomenological perspective.

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Significance of the Study

A study of quality of life through the experiences of physical activity is significant for a number of reasons. First, it is important for educators (coaches, teachers, administrators) and health practitioners to understand individual experience. Creating awareness can lead to better decision making as well as tactful, empathic action. An understanding of experience can also help practitioners act in a more holistic fashion, dealing with the whole individual rather than segmenting the parts of the individual. Second, this research addresses some of the gaps in the current literature. It seems that most research involving physical activity and quality of life has focused on the physical and mental health outcomes of individuals. This research offers insight into prevention and promotion by examining experiences beyond the physical. Many dimensions play on an individuals health during the course of a season. Relationships, time restrictions, academic pressures, and athletic pressures are only a few of the factors that influence health and well being. In light of recent cutbacks in education and healthcare, it seems that an increased understanding of these aspects may help policy makers move from prevention to promotion. This information is also important for policy makers of athletic programs. Third, this research may provide a means for examining the assumption that physical activity is inherently good and improves all aspects of living. It is possible that this research will enlighten us to the qualities important for the experience of a high quality of life. This work may provide hope for those that are trying to improve the quality of their lives. These understandings are significant as we move from state controlled health and education to a paradigm of personal responsibility.

The Phenomenological Method

As VanManen (1990) stated, " A research method is only a way of investigating certain kinds of questions. The questions themselves and the way one understands the questions are the important starting points, not the method as such" (p.1). My questions

seemed best suited to phenomenological inquiry. It was my intention, via phenomenological method, to understand and describe the lived experiences of athletes participating in university athletics, in order to understand the influence of these experiences on quality of life.

Phenomenology is a qualitative method of inquiry concerned with the description of lived experience. Phenomenology can be described as a complex blend of art and science attempting to shed consciousness on some aspect of the lived world. This typically involves the creation of text based on an open-ended interview process, observations, and reflection. The hope of phenomenological inquiry is to create a deepened understanding of human experience through text.

The basis of phenomenological inquiry is pedagogic. "Human science does not see theory as something that stands before practice in order to 'inform' it. Rather theory enlightens practice. Practice (or life) comes first and theory comes later as a result of reflection" (VanManen, 1990, p.15). Phenomenology is concerned with the blending of theory and practice to arrive at common human understandings. It is not important to develop theory and then relate it to practice, rather the purpose of phenomenology is to explore the fundamental nature of human experiences. The result is to produce action sensitive knowledge so that educators can act in a thoughtful and tactful manner.

Phenomenology is a descriptive methodology, and as such, I did not attempt to develop a model or theory to explain the participants' experiences. My intent was to explore, understand and describe experience. Phenomenology, according to VanManen (1984), is the study of "the world as we immediately experience it rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, and theorize about it" (p.37). Phenomenology is concerned with understanding the nature or meaning of an experience rather than the underlying motives of experience.

A phenomenon may be viewed from a multitude of perspectives, but there will always be aspects of an experience that are left unexplored. As such, our understanding can never be complete. "Phenomenological research on a certain phenomena is never complete but always in process" (Duenkel, 1994, p.39). A researcher can, in no way,

exhaust an experience. Good phenomenological research seeks to illuminate key aspects of an experience in such a way that the experience can be recognized and distinguished from other phenomena while encouraging us to ask further questions. Is this really what the experience is about? It is my hope that this research will encourage further questions.

Bracketing and Reduction

Phenomenologists are concerned with describing the essence of experience. In so doing the researcher does not maintain a mode of neutrality commonly held in other forms of investigation. "Phenomenologists are thought to be breaking from the traditional presuppositions of neutrality, control and separation of subject and object" (Duenkel, 1994, p.40). It is therefore critical that the researcher is able to suspend ". . . one's various beliefs in the reality of the natural world in order to study the essential structures of the world" (VanManen, 1990, p.175). It is through an awareness of these beliefs, or bracketing, that one is more likely to set them aside and less likely to impose them on the research participants (Becker, 1986).

How I Came to Study This Question?

My experiences as an athlete, coach, and spectator have undoubtedly influenced my desire to understand the experience of people participating in sport. Through my involvement I have realized that many myths exist surrounding the benefits of sport. Our views of sport are very often skewed by the media and popular beliefs. Sport can be multidimensional for those participating, it is not only the glory of victory and the agony of defeat. We create our own meanings through our sporting experiences and the quality of our lives are undoubtedly influenced by our sporting involvements. Sport can be a powerful means of enhancing our lives.

As an educator I have struggled to help people expand their potential. I have always been curious about those who excel at sport and other aspects of life. It seems to me that those involved in university sport have an opportunity to develop multiple aspects of their being. My feeling is that involvement in sport, properly understood and managed, can improve the quality of one's life. I think that currently the experiences of individuals have not been fully captured and that these voices need to be heard. My

desire to understand and improve quality of life, for myself and others, through sport has led me to pursue these questions.

What Preconceptions and Foreunderstandings do I Bring to my Exploration of this Question?

* Involvement in sport can improve the quality of a person's life.
* Involvement in sport can reduce the quality of one's life.
* Sport is a neutral entity that can be directed for the positive or negative development of a person.
* Quality of life is dependent upon some sense of balance.
* Sport experience can be multidimensional: social, emotional, mental, physical, spiritual
* Sport can be a good environment to develop multidimensional aspects of being human
* Each individual is unique and quality of life will be different for each person
* As an educator I can help people improve quality of life
* Quality of life is conceptual rather than experiential
* Canadian university athletes generally have positive experiences

Bracketing also assists in the essential process of reduction. Reduction allows the researcher to come to an understanding of the essential structure or nature of something. By clearly stating beliefs the researcher is able to overcome one's subjective feelings or expectations, strip away the theoretical or scientific conceptions which may overlay and abstract the studied phenomena, and move past the particularities of experience in order to clearly see the essence of an experience (VanManen, 1990). Clearly stating beliefs not only encourages a researcher to seek the essence of an experience, it better allows the data to stand alone while providing a framework from which the reader can check the 'validity' of the data observed (Wertz, 1984).

Role of the Researcher

My primary role as researcher was in selecting participants, conducting interviews, analyzing the data, and writing the text. I engaged in purposive sampling

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985) while seeking participants' permission to be interviewed regarding their experiences. The results of interviews were not reported directly, rather excerpts from interviews were carefully integrated into a running text that described the experiences of the participants. My role was much like a reporter, trying to make sense of what was being said and organizing it through text. My intention was to provide participants with an opportunity to describe their experiences and perceptions in their own language rather than the language of the researcher.

It was explained to possible participants that all information was to remain confidential and that anonymity would be maintained (see Appendix A). Participant names were not used in the text, nor were significant places or events that may reveal the identity of participants. In any event the text is not a direct description of participant experiences, rather it is an amalgam of experiences and characters. I also made it clear that information was to be used only in an effort to produce a text that described the experiences of physical activity through university athletics.

Research Setting

It was difficult for me to determine the best research setting. I changed my opinion as to the best group or groups to study several times. I originally envisioned interviewing individuals from a wide range of physical activity domains. I thought that including different activity types would help to provide a clear picture as to how physical activity is experienced and contributes to quality of life. However, including these domains would have increased the scope of the study, thus, the question would be harder to address. Instead I chose to focus the study in such a way as to address experiences from a more limited perspective.

All research participants were from University of Alberta sport teams. I was interested in examining the physical activity experiences of elite university athletes. One of the reasons I pursued this group is my interest in working with them to develop mental skills. I am generally concerned with helping people explore their potential in a positive environment. I want to work with groups that are motivated and capable of producing positive change. Elite athletes, for the most part, fit in this category. Second, there is a

very limited base of research regarding athletes and quality of life. As one of my goals is to try to assist athletes, I think it is important that I have some understanding of the experiences they live. Third, opportunities to work with elite athletes are rare. My current situation allowed me access to some of the university teams. I was able to access participants through contacts I have with players, grad students, coaches and faculty members. Finally, the athlete's perspective provided insight in several distinct physical activity experiences: training, practice, and the actual competitive situation. By interviewing elite athletes, I was able to limit the scope of my research question while still exploring different physical activity experiences.

What is essential to phenomenological research is the illumination of an experience. In this sense there are no guarantees that a phenomena will be able to be understood with a specified number of participants or number of interviews. Data collection continued until it was felt that the phenomena being studied was adequately understood. At the beginning of this study I felt I would try to gain entry with three or four teams. Within each team I hoped to conduct in depth interviews with two or three athletes. I intended to get at least one formal, detailed interview with each of the different players. I was focusing on depth, therefore I felt it would be adequate to have a small number of participants. Again, I am interested in describing a lived experience with detail. As long as the text is rich and speaks to the experience I will have satisfied my purpose. Keeping this in mind I formally interviewed a total of 4 university athletes conducting a total of eight interviews ranging from one hour to one and a half hours in length per interview.

Data Collection Procedures

Although formal interviews are the primary source of data, phenomenological research encourages the use of other forms of data collection. Data collection occurred in four ways: formal interviews, observations, informal interviews, and personal experiences.

Formal interviews

I conducted multiple, unstructured, open-ended interviews and maintained interview notes. The interview notes helped me to track interesting comments, themes, and to explore new ideas. These notes were not a verbatim record as all interviews were audio taped and then transcribed.

The participants were interviewed regarding their physical activity involvement. I started with an initial interview of approximately one hour in length. Further interviews were continued as needed with the permission of the participants.

Observations

I also made a small number of reflective observational notes as a non-participant observer watching athletes in practice and competitive situations. I had hoped that observing would promote my understanding of the context of experience as well as providing potential ideas for questions and themes to be pursued.

Informal interviews

I had a large number of discussions with fellow graduate students, my committee, friends, and other athletes regarding the study. Many of these individuals offered perspectives from an academic standpoint as well as from an athletes point of view as many of them had competed at the university level. These conversations helped to stimulate the formal interview process as well as the writing of the text. These conversations were invaluable in helping me check my assumptions as well as verify the accuracy of my writing.

Personal experience and reflection

I also examined written materials describing experiences in physical activity including biographies, magazine articles, philosophical writings and other research papers. Apart from the interviews, these writings helped to describe physical activity experiences and quality of life. They also provided examples that were used to relate experience and encourage discussion during the interviews or to illuminate themes and narrative for the text. My personal experiences as an athlete, coach, and in other capacities working with teams helped to fuel the interview and writing process.

Data Management Procedures

I maintained a strict protocol for managing the data. I kept a loose leaf binder divided into sections containing the interviews, interview notes, readings, reflective notes and miscellaneous information. I also labeled and stored all audio recordings in a safe location. The interview notes and protocol consisted of opening statements, the key questions, probes, space for important participant comments, and space for reflective notes. Reflective notes provided a space for recording personal thoughts, feelings, speculations, etc. I also had a recording sequence to observe the date, time, place, and participant for each interview.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data collection and writing. Sorting information into categories or themes, forming a story, and writing the text were also simultaneous activities. Data were reduced into patterns and themes and then organized into a whole, larger picture to describe quality of life through the experience of physical activity. The text was organized, ". . . in terms of the nature of the phenomena being addressed, and the investigative method that appear(ed) appropriate to it" (VanManen, 1990, p.173). I organized and created the text using a combination of thematic, analytic, and exemplificative approaches. More specifically, I chose to organize the text in such a way as to take the reader on a lived journey of the university athlete. I created a group of characters amalgamated from the data collection and engaged them in the description of their experiences over the course of a season. I tried to create the characters in such a way as that each could best exemplify specific aspects of the university athletic experience.

Verification

The test of a good phenomenological piece is how "it reads." It is not important that the text reflect precisely what was stated by participants, rather that it reflect the spirit of the ideas. One method of verifying is to check with informants about themes and ideas to see if conclusions seem accurate. Part of the interview process involved verification. I spent time within each interview checking what the participants had said.

This most often took the form of rephrasing a comment from the participant and asking them to clarify or expand. I also used the participants comments as a means of exploring new ideas. I further engaged in checking procedures by having colleagues, some with university sport experience, read the developing text to see if it appeared to be accurate. Finally I allowed member checks of the text to see if the writing accurately described aspects of university athletic life as it had been experienced.

Questions

The following two research questions addressed the overall focus of the study. The primary focus of the study was to determine the lifeworld experience of the university athlete through physical activity. And second, how was this experience related to quality of life of the individual? The nature of the physical activity experience was fully explored before concepts of quality of life were discussed.

All interviews began with a series of questions intended to help establish rapport and gather some basic information about the participants. This introductory phase included questions such as: How long have you played? What is your current involvement with the team? How did you come to play university sport? The next step was to move into more specific questions regarding the study. What is life like as a university athlete? This question allowed the participant to say anything they felt significant and often revealed a number of areas for future pursuit. The next phase of the initial interview was to have the athlete describe the overall course of a season, week, and day, getting as specific as possible. I then asked each participant to describe typical practice days, game days at home and away, and days off, being careful to note distinctions among experiences. From these beginnings I could move to more specific themes based upon the responses of the participants. I simply followed up on what appeared to be significant information. As a general rule I tried to pursue information that was least intimidating and as the interview or interviews progressed I moved to more sensitive areas. Questions varied for each participant but generally themes emerged surrounding the mental, physical, social, and to some degree the spiritual dimensions of being a university athlete.

Once I fully explored the physical activity experience I approached quality of life. I tried to have the athletes explain how they related their experiences in physical activity to their conception of quality of life. I tried to let the athletes' definitions of quality of life evolve from the interviews rather than asking them directly.

Definitions

Although I was operating with an emergent design, it was important to have a working, if tentative understanding of the concepts I was examining.

Quality of life

There are an abundance of definitions for quality of life currently used, some of which I have listed in my literature review. I did not define quality of life for the purposes of this study, rather it was to be defined by the participants. Quality of life is a very personally defined concept; it has different meanings for different people. It was my hope that participants would describe and relate quality of life as they conceived it rather than through the words of the researcher. However, I think it is necessary for me to note my personal view of the concept. Quality of life, to me, refers to how an individual experiences life. This definition is based on the idea that quality of life is a reflection of the level of balance between social, physical, mental, and spiritual needs of the individual (Covey, 1994). Quality of life is also a reflection of the balance between the challenges an individual faces and his/her capacity to handle those challenges (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Physical activity

Physical activity was defined according to domain. I was not looking at labour intensive jobs but rather organized, structured physical activities in a time and place removed from everyday life experience. In particular, I examined individuals in elite sport. Elite sport was defined as the participation in an organized athletic setting involving training and competition at the university level.

CHAPTER IV

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXPERIENTIAL DESCRIPTION

Why I Wrote This Way

Developing the text was a long, complicated process involving many significant changes. One tenant of phenomenology is to construct the text in such a way as to enhance the understanding of the phenomena being studied. For example: a discussion of the experience of time may use descriptive language that mimics the experience of time. Long, drawn out sentences may be used to describe time as experienced slowly, or short choppy words and sentences that describe the experience of time passing quickly. I started with a relatively simple idea to develop the text in a way that would mimic an actual university athletic season. My intent was to create the atmosphere of the day to day university athletic experience through a cast of characters over the course of an entire season. In this way I could highlight the changing aspect of seasonality.

Creating a cast of characters as well as a storyline was a difficult process. Many of the situations were based on the actual experiences of the athletes interviewed. However, I felt that completing a detailed description of each participant's experience would be less effective than having the reader live the experiences through a fictionalized story. I also had to create a number of situations to try and explore various themes. To assist in the telling of the story characters were amalgamated from the study participants. I took significant events and traits from each participant and created new characters that could reveal the athletes' experiences in story. I chose to use each new character in those situations where they could best exemplify a particular aspect of the university athlete's experience. Paradoxically, I had to separate the qualities and experiences of real people so I could reassemble them in created characters to better highlight aspects of the university athletic experience.

I found that as my writing progressed it became more difficult to construct the text. One of the difficulties in creating the storyline was maintaining consistency amongst the characters without repetition. I knew most of the areas I wanted to describe,

however I found I was continually double checking what I was writing. Had I already written this? What did I say about this character before? Does this fit with what has already been written? How do I tie these ideas together? I went through many changes in the organization of the text before I arrived at a final product. A great deal of the writing changed over time. Sometimes what I had written the day before no longer made sense. I would have to go back and change it or delete it entirely in order to stay consistent with the storyline. This is not to say that the writing was always difficult, some days the story would seem to write itself, however more often than not I would have to painstakingly plan and construct the direction of the text while making constant adjustments.

The following text can in no way, nor is it intended to, illuminate all aspects of the playing experience. There will be, I'm sure, many gaps. Some due to my abilities as researcher and writer and others due to the sheer volume of information that could have been included in the text. It is important to note that the purpose of the research was to create an understanding of the experience rather than an exhaustive description of the experience. This is but one understanding. There are many unanswered questions yet to be explored.

Cast of Characters

It is my hope that introducing the reader to the cast of characters will ease difficulties in following the ongoing text. Following is a brief description of the major characters presented in the text.

Pete

First year soccer player. A talented player. He is out going and well liked. He is in the sciences program. .

Mark

First year soccer player. A physical education student. He is quiet, reserved and well liked by his teammates.

Danny

Fourth year veteran soccer player. One of the star defenders on the team. He is respected by his teammates as a leader. He is also a very independent person. Danny has

been plagued by injuries in the past year.

Sara

Third year soccer player. She is a hard working student and a talented athlete.

Clayton

Fourth year volleyball player. He is a dedicated athlete and student.

Candace

Veteran volleyball player. She is an excellent student and athlete.

CHAPTER V

EXPERIENTIAL DESCRIPTION (FINDINGS)

Pre-Season

Stranger In A Strange Land

Man is it ever packed in here. I don't think I've ever seen this many people in one spot. Where the heck am I supposed to go? This is crazy. Is that my line? Why are they all going over there? What'd I get myself into? Hey is that Gary? Oh man, tell me that's Gary. Yes! Maybe he can tell me how this place works.

I must've been here for hours already. Good thing I ran into Gary. No telling how much longer I would've been waiting in that other line. I'm gonna freak, way too many people in here, way too slow. If I don't get out of here soon I'm gonna be late for practice. I wonder what we're doing? I sure hope I don't screw up. Oh shit, shit, practice starts in 10 minutes and I still have to go through those two lines. What's taking so long? All they gotta do is take the picture! I gotta bail, gotta make practice. Stupid lines.

First practice. First practice. Nervous, nervous, nervous. Gotta get there. Whew! I'm bagged. Barely made it! I wish that chick could've just told me where the change room was instead of making me wait in line. So many freaking lines at this place. Stand here. Go there. No you're in the wrong line, go over there. But I just came from there. I hope classes aren't like this, I don't know if I can handle that all the time. Better get focused on playing. I can't afford to get behind at these tryouts or I'll never make the squad. Cool! University tryouts. I'm actually trying out for a university team. Wow. I never thought this would happen.

Geez these guys all look big. I don't recognize anyone. I wonder how many of these guys played last year? What's coach saying? We're doing what?!! I don't have a clue what he's talking about. Oh no! Don't look at me. Don't pick me . . . whew! I don't want to look like a dweeb in the first minute. I'm getting freaked here. Everyone looks so good. Oh man, how am I going to make this team?

Run, run, run. I'm tired. Everyone just finished provincials this weekend. You'd

think he'd take it easy on us. Way too much running. Am I the only one tired out here? Knees are killing me. This is like junior high again. Dribble the ball all the way to the end and come back. Boring. Oh man, shouldn't have thought that. Dribbling's good, dribbling's good. I don't want to do any more running. Standing in line is good, rest is good. Please be just about done. I'm about ready to keel over. I'm bagged. Yes. Finally done. Forget stretching. I'm going straight home. Phone the boys and tell them I'm not going out. I better just get some sleep tonight and save my energy for next practice and figure out what I have to do tomorrow. Can't wait to hit the sheets. I'm gonna sleep like a rock.

Alarm!? What? I just got to sleep, it can't be time to get up yet. Eight o'clock already. Just five more minutes of sleep. Oh man, I better get up now or I'm never gonna get my butt out of bed. Aaggghhh!!! Pain. I should've stretched last night. I'm killing all over. Tired too. I didn't think we did that much. I guess I was pumped, didn't seem like a lot. Pretty hungry. Get some breakfast. Man do I feel like a slug. I better loosen up before tonight or I'm in for some serious trouble. What's the plan for today? Take the bus to school and then finish getting my picture and i.d. card, run those other errands. See if I can meet Gary and those other guys at the beer gardens this afternoon. Gotta see if I can hitch a ride to school. I don't think I can keep my eyes open wide enough to drive.

That took long enough. At least it's done. I.d. card under my belt and a billion more things to go. What else do I have to do? Run to the Registrars office, go to the Arts building see if I can get into that course. Student loan line. I guess I better do that. I wonder how long it takes to get the money? I could sure use a new stereo. Get some cd's too! Man am I sore from yesterday. Maybe I better save the money for a good chiropractor. At this rate I'm gonna be in a wheelchair in a month. My knees are still bugging me from those sprinting drills. If I could just get a week to heal all these little aches and pains I think I'd be fine. One day of practice and I think I need a week to heal. This could be a tough season.

Second practice already. At least I'm not as nervous as yesterday. Wow! Did

everyone shrink or something? These guys aren't nearly as big as I thought they were. Everyone looked so huge yesterday. Funny. I wonder if they were thinking the same thing I was. Wouldn't that be hilarious. All of us spooked by the other 'giants'. I guess you just need to get out and run around a bit with everyone and touch the ball to loosen some of the nerves. That first practice sure had me worried though. I'll be glad when this whole tryout thing is done. The vets must get used to it. They didn't seem nervous at all. I wonder if they ever felt nervous. They must get a little frustrated having to go through all these practices when they pretty much know they're going to be on the team. They probably hate all of us tryout nerds. I wonder if I'll make it. Maybe I'll be a vet someday, then I can hate all the tryout nerds.

Some of the senior players aren't even here yet. I heard someone say that the first two days of practice are optional for vets, most of them take the couple of days to get healed up. Some of them come in to get some work done. I don't think I would come in if I didn't have to. Only the die hards are here. So much to do in these first two days. I can't figure it out. At least they're not involved in too much of the practice. They've mostly been helping out coach and doing drills on their own. I guess coach wants to narrow down the rookies before he starts working everybody together. Tomorrow we get to work in with all the vets. Getting nervous. I need to stay focused though. I still have to get past this practice.

Thank God there hasn't been as much running today. If we did any more sprints like yesterday I'd need a stretcher to get home tonight. Still stiff, but I'm starting to loosen up a bit. Lots and lots of ball control stuff today. Not too many screw ups so far. I think I'm doing pretty good so far. I wonder why we're doing all these line drills. Coach wants to get a real close look at our individual skills I guess. This is better than running but I'm getting a little bored. I hope we do some game stuff. I'm better in the real situation than I am running around from line to line. How much can he really tell just by watching us pass the ball around anyway? Doesn't he want to see us play? I wonder how many of us rookies are going to make the squad? There's some really strong players out here. There's some really weak guys too. Not as many as yesterday. I guess some guys

must have quit, maybe coach told them to take a walk already.

Respect

Tossing and turning all night. Couldn't get tryouts off my mind. I hope I made it. I think I got about two minutes of sleep last night. I should've done more stretching. My legs feel like lead. I should've known better. I always get sore a couple of days after. It wasn't too bad the first night, but today, I need to use the rack to get my legs straightened out! There it is. Check the list. No . . . I can't check the list. I have to check the list. Stupid list. What if I got cut? Gotta check, gotta check. What a horrible way to find out you've been axed. Name's on the list, you're gone. Okay, deep breath, here goes. Looking . . . looking . . . looking . . . I don't believe it. Wait a second, check again . . . make sure I didn't mess up. All right, one more time just to make sure. Wow! I don't believe it. I'm not on there. Yeah! All right!! I'm not on the list! I made it another day. Man does that take a load off of my mind. Now I can relax a bit. Right on. I'll get my books and then I better head home and get in a nap this afternoon, I'm gonna need some energy for tonight.

Oh hell am I ever nervous. There's half as many guys now and twice as many stars. This is going to be a tough practice. I've heard so many stories about some of these guys. Here comes Ciccone. He was a Western all-star last year. He's supposed to be a real sweetheart, the kind of guy they have to keep locked up before and after games.

"Hey rook."

"Huh! Oh . . . hey."

"You're in my way."

"Oh. Uh . . . sorry?"

"Show some respect. Don't do it again rook, I'll be watching."

"Uh, yeah. Gotcha." Loser capital L. I guess that rumour was true. Well, that's one less guy competing with me for the Most Sportsmanlike Award.

Great, great, flipping great. I have to do this drill against Ciccone. Thanks for nothing. Well, I guess tryouts were fun while they lasted. Better luck next year. At least I'll be able to go to the beer gardens later. Ackk! What am I talking about. Just try . . .

and pray for a miracle. Maybe his head will explode or something. That's about the only way I think I'll beat him. Fake to the left and boom, his head explodes. Hmmm, probably not going to happen. The guy's a real jerk, maybe it wouldn't be such a bad thing if his head did blow up. Move in real slow and then fake to the left. Burst of speed and go right. Right on, beat him. Boy was that sweet, eat dirt loser.

Whack!!

Whufff!!! Elbow in the back. What the hell was that all about?

"Do that again rook and you'll be putting your teeth in a jar."

"Cut it out Cic! What do you think you're doing?"

"Stay out of this Danny. This is between me and the rook here."

"He's on our side Cic, remember?"

"Not yet he's not. Remember that rook."

Better pick myself up. I don't want coach seeing me on the ground. I'm glad this guy's on our team, I think. I'd hate to play against him in a real game.

"Don't let him get to you. Ciccone's a bit of head case. He's got some kind of personality disorder. He wants everyone to be afraid of him and he hates getting beaten."

Some kind of personality disorder? I'll say. He's a psychopath. Certifiable loonie. Does that guy have any friends? "Thanks man. Uh, Danny is it? I just hope the coach doesn't think I looked like a loser. By the way, I'm Pete."

"Hey Pete. You did all right. Ciccone's a pretty good player. The only thing coach'll notice was the way you beat him. Cic's a little pissed because you made it look so easy. Like I said, Cic's all show, you just have to ignore him."

"Thanks Danny."

"We better get back in there."

Third practice down and it looks like I'm still around. Must be doing something right. Thank God we're done. I got a tonne of stuff to do. What's coach saying now. Blah, blah, blah. I wish he'd hurry up and let us go. What! What was that last thing? We've got a tournament this weekend already. We're leaving Friday morning?! Wait a second. I don't even know if I'm gonna make the team. I'm supposed to move all my

stuff on Saturday. I can't go this weekend. This has got to be some kind of bad joke. Man, what a headache. I'm dying to play, but how am I going to do all this? First week of school and I'm already gonna miss classes for this tournament, I gotta move in to my apartment, and we've practiced every day for two hours. I don't even know if I registered properly. What am I doing here? Too much stuff to do. I barely know what my classes are let alone where they are and coach says I gotta find the prof for Friday's class and tell him I'm missing the first day. What if I can't find the prof? That's gonna get me in the good books. Oh man what a headache. So much stuff to do tomorrow. Practice is at five. How am I going to get everything done?

I need to get home and have a shower, put some things together for tomorrow and get some sleep. I really didn't need something else to think about. And now Ciccone hates me. For such a good practice I sure feel lousy.

"Hey man."

"Hey."

"That was a pretty cool move you put on Ciccone this afternoon."

"I just got lucky. He guessed wrong and I got past him."

"No way. It was an awesome move. I saw him crank you in the back. Don't worry about it, he's just a sore loser. Everyone was happy to see you beat him. That guy's a real idiot. I think you're going to make it."

"Thanks. Right now I'm not even sure if I want to make it. There's just so many things to do. And now this tournament on the weekend . . . you know. By the way I'm Pete."

"Nice to meet you Pete. I'm Mark. I'm a little worried myself. I think I'm doing all right but it's hard to say what the coach is looking for. There's a couple of guys he cut that I thought were going to make it for sure."

"I know what you mean. I saw some of the moves you used today. You've had a strong camp. I think you've got as good a shot as anyone left. I guess the tournament will be what decides who stays and who doesn't. Anyway, I gotta get going. I'll see you for tomorrow's practice. Good luck the rest of the way."

"Thanks man. I'll see you tomorrow."

First day of classes. I hope they don't suck. Tuesdays and Thursdays could be a little rough. Three one and a half hour lectures in one day might have been a mistake. I'm gonna be dead by the time I make it to practice on those days. Getting ahead of myself. I've got to make the team first. Hell, I've got to make it to class first, maybe they won't be that bad. Could be I'll even like them.

What a day. I didn't think they'd all give a full lecture. This isn't going to be an easy year. If I make it I guess it'll be worth all the work. Just so much already. One more practice and then we hit the tournament. I wish we weren't playing until next weekend. Everyone I know is going out tonight, not me though. No, I get to practice, go home and pack for the tournament. I want to play but I think I'd rather go out this weekend. I can't believe we have to leave at five in the morning. Maybe I could go out for a bit . . . ? Nah, I'd never make it to the bus on time. Everyone else goes out, I play soccer. It feels like all I've done all week is play soccer. Oh yeah. That is all I've done this week. I need a break. Not even a full week and I need a break. This better get a little easier.

Back To The Grind

Get registered and get out of here. Two days to sit back and relax before we start training. Thank god. Am I ever glad that I don't have to go to the first two practices. I'm still tired from summer league. I need those couple of days rest. I wish I could get the whole week off, try and heal up some of these wounds. I've gotta get a handle on this injury soon or I'm gonna miss the beginning of the season. Season's too short to be hurt, no time for injuries. I need to get back into top form quick.

That was fast. I must be finally figuring out that zoo down there. It doesn't take me nearly as long to get registered as it used to. I've still got time to try and get some books and grab something to eat. I wonder what the rest of the guys are doing? I haven't seen any of them around yet. I'll try and meet up with them later, guaranteed they'll be at the beer gardens. Maybe I should've . . .

"Hey Danny boy! How was your summer man? I haven't seen you in a while."

"Waylon! You surprised me man. I'm doing good. Worked out at my dad's shop most of the summer, earned a little bit of money. Other than that I was just playing soccer. How about you?"

"I took off to B.C. for most of the summer. I went home, worked some of the hockey camps. I came up here for the Uof A hockey schools at the end of August. I'm glad that's over. Babysitting kids all day isn't my thing. Listen, I've gotta get going. I'm supposed to meet some of the guys about half an hour ago. Hey we're having a party on Tuesday. Why don't you come over?"

"Sounds good man. I'll see you there."

"Later Dan. Good to see ya."

"You too Waylon."

Good thing I ran into Waylon. I haven't seen him since they finished playoffs. His party's gonna be a shaker. Probably see all of the old gang there. Definitely a good thing I don't have to go to the first couple of practices. If only I didn't have to go to Wednesday's practice. Book lines are way too long. Get something to eat.

I better wolf this down, it's nearly eleven, time for physio. They've seen me more than my girlfriend lately. Hip's still acting up. I can't even sleep without taking tylenol. I don't know if those exercises are helping at all. I'm doing them all the time but I've still got no change in my mobility. Good thing I don't have to try out. I wouldn't have a prayer. Sure hope I can get this thing under control soon though. I don't want to miss any of the season. Nick's gone, so's Mancuso. Leaves it open for me. This is going to be my year.

That was painful. I think Jerry enjoys making me flinch.

"I need to see you the rest of the week, You're not healing as fast as you should be. Have you been taking it easy?"

"I told you Jerry, I had to play. It was the first time I've ever made it to Nationals and this might be the last year I play with them."

"All right. But you know you're going to have to stay out of soccer for a while if you want to heal. And if you keep this up you might do some permanent damage. I don't

know why I tell you all of this, you never listen. I need to see you for the rest of the week and promise me you'll talk to your coach and let him know what's going on. You've got to take it easy for a while to get better."

"Yeah, yeah, I know Jerry. It's just that this is my big year, I can't afford to be out for long." I've gotta see him the rest of the week. I guess it's got to be done if I want to play. He doesn't like the way things are looking. Not healing fast enough. I should've taken the summer off. Giving me grief for not taking better care of myself. What am I supposed to do? I can't stop playing. This is my year, I just need a little time, I'll get better.

Checking It Out

Okay. First practice. Let's see if I can get through this without killing myself. Feels like I can barely move my hip. Talk to coach and let him know what's going on. I don't want him thinking I'm slacking. How do I let him know without getting my butt benched? I don't think he's going to take this too well. We've got a good shot this year. The last thing he wants to hear right know is that I've got an injury. Maybe I shouldn't tell him. He's got enough to think about, his mind's on the new tryouts. I wonder what the rooks are like this year? A couple of strong players down the middle and we could do some damage. As good a shot as any to win Nationals. I hope we don't get any attitudes like the last couple of years. Last thing we need is another Ciccone.

That went smooth. So much for hiding this from coach. I don't think I got near the ball once in that drill. Don't know what I was expecting. Too much pain. I feel like I can barely walk. Maybe Jerry's right. I don't know if I can keep this up. Some of those rooks look pretty good. No, I just can't lose my spot. This is gonna be my year. Gotta keep playing, just try to forget about the pain, keep my spot. Gotta focus. This is gonna be my year.

Wow. I'm kind of surprised. I never thought coach would react that way. I thought he'd be upset for sure. He seemed like he was okay though. Letting me take the rest of tryouts off to try and heal up. Right on. Still wish I could play, just hurts so damn much. It's gonna suck watching the tournament from the bench. I can't handle sitting off.

I guess it's really only the pre-season tournament. Still, it's gonna be hard. Well, makes it a little easier to go to Waylon's party, see the boys. Maybe I should get in early, try and get some readings done before we leave on Friday. Nah. What am I thinking? I haven't even had my first class yet. I'll do it on the bus, have some fun tonight, won't get too many more chances before the season's over.

What a night. Those guys are wild. I don't know how they make it through the year partying like that every weekend. Better get out of bed, gotta see Jerry in an hour. First day. See if I can actually make it to class on time. I wonder what classes will be like this year? I hope I didn't get Peterson for the econ lecture. He still hates me from first year, "Are you here to go to school or to play a stupid game. I'm not doing you any favours just because you play a sport. You'll write the exam when everyone else does and I'll have no exceptions." What a loser. That guy needs a head transplant. Pure jealousy. What's the big deal anyway? It's not like it's any more work for him to have me write the exam later. That guy's got it in for athletes.

I Can't Sit Through Any More Of This

I can't handle this. I should be out there playing. The rookies are making mistakes everywhere. A lot of simple plays, and Ciccone's not helping them out. Yelling at them's just going to make it worse. I wish coach would let me play, just for a few minutes. I can't stand sitting here. I better be feeling better soon. I wouldn't mind missing practice for the rest of the year, but I can't handle watching these games. Even if it is just pre-season. We should be destroying these guys. This is driving me crazy and I've still got three more games to sit through. I've definitely got to heal soon. I'd rather lose than sit on the bench. Stupid hip. I could be out there playing or at least back home, going out instead of just sitting here. This tournament is just turning into another weekend down the drain.

Put Me In Coach!

All right. I've been sitting here for the first sixty minutes. When am I going to get in? I thought we we're here so he could see us play. I hate this. How can I show what I can do by sitting here . . .

"Pete . . . PETE!!"

"Huh! Yeah coach?"

"I want you to get ready to take over for Edgar. I'm going to put you in at striker."

"All right coach." I'm gonna play. Finally, I thought my ass was going to sink into the bench. Get warm. Striker. I hope I don't screw up. Just play the way I can and not worry about things too much. Smell the air, the grass. Fresh. Warm, sunny. I love it out here. Feeling good. I'm gonna have a good game. Don't try and do too much. I don't have to be a star, just play my position and don't make any mistakes.

"It just gets so frustrating Pete. I mean you only get on for ten minutes and then he's switching you off again. I can't get into a rhythm like that. I feel like I barely get enough time to warm up. Why'd he pull me off so soon? Did I make a mistake? What if I made some mistakes out there? I just feel like I need to score or something. Really make an impression. I wish I knew what he's looking at."

"We can't worry about it too much Mark. He's got a lot of players to check out still. He can only give us so much time on the field and then he needs to look at other players. The way I see it is we have as good a shot as anyone here. As long as we don't mess up too badly we should make it."

"I hope so Pete. It'd seem like such a waste of all this time if we didn't make it. This is really important to me."

"I know. But hey, there's at least three games left in the tournament. I'm sure we'll get some more playing time. We've gotta stay positive. I mean you nearly scored and you were only on for fifteen minutes. You'll get more time. We can't be too hard on ourselves either. It's our first time playing at this level. What can we expect? We've made it this far, I think we're doing good."

"I guess so. I just really want to make the squad. It means a lot to me and I feel like I haven't shown what I can do."

"Just hang in there Mark. Hang in there."

Making the Grade

Am I glad to be home. What a weekend. I think I did okay. Can't wait till Tuesday to see if I made the squad. That'd be so cool. I gotta try and get a hold of my profs tomorrow and see if I can get the course outline and notes from the first class. Boy are they gonna love me. I can't believe this, one week in and I'm already behind. I feel like I've been going non stop since Monday. At least we get tomorrow off. My body's killing me. Is this what the rest of the year's gonna be like?

Edwards wasn't much better than Kovac. At least he didn't give me a lecture about attending class and wasting his precious time. I don't get it. I thought these guys are here to help us, why's it seem like such a big deal. Mark said his profs were practically falling all over him to get him stuff. Maybe I should switch into phys. ed. too. Seems like nobody in science has even heard of sports before. What a hassle. At least I got the material. Still, I can't believe how much we've covered already. I'm in big trouble for those chem labs. If this is what happens every time I miss a day it's gonna be a long year. And I've got soccer every day for the next three months. Gotta get organized and in a hurry to get on top of things. I can pretty much forget about trying to study after practice. Last week I could barely keep my eyes open long enough to get back home. I'm gonna have to do it between class and practice. This is a lot more work than I bargained for. I hope it's all worth it, still don't even know if I made the squad.

Today's the day. Am I in or not? Find the list. Coach said it'd be posted by nine outside the team room . . . there it is. Read it slowly Petey. I don't want to get worked up over nothing. Hey right on, Mark's on there. Way to be Mark! Oh man, I'm sweating here.

"Yeah!!!" Ooops. That was a little loud. Calm down a bit. People will be wondering what I'm doing dancing in the hall. I can't believe it. I made it. I'm a Bear. I actually made it. Wow, this is cool. I'm part of the team. Cool, cool, cool. I can't believe it. I can't even think. I'm a Bear. I really did it. I gotta go out and celebrate. I wonder what the rest of the rookies are doing tonight? We should definitely go out. Call my parents too, dad'll love this. Slow down a bit there, I've still got classes and practice

tonight. Am I ever gonna have trouble concentrating for the rest of the day. Get it together. Find Mark and then get to class. Hit the town after practice. It's gonna be a great day. I made it. I'm a university athlete.

Early Season

Good to See You

All right. Enough of this. I've figured out my schedule as best I can. Practice times are set. My classes are set. Now if I can just follow through on this for the rest of the term I should be fine. Time to go workout and blow off some steam. See if I can find anyone to work out with me in the team room.

"Hey boys! How you doing?"

"Clayton bud!! Good to see you. Me and the boys were just working on something."

"I'm sure you were. You guys up to no good again? I don't even need to ask that. Of course not. So what'd you do? Is something going to explode in my face or did you decorate my locker again?"

"Nothing like that. But speaking of lockers, aren't you going to put your stuff away? Why don't you open you locker man?"

"Come on guys, I could hear you snickering from the hallway. What'd you do?"

"Just open it already!"

Jeez. What'd they do this time? They'll either get me now or later. Might as well be now, at least I'm ready for it. All right here goes . . . slowly . . . nothing. "What's going on? Do I get zapped when I reach in there or something?" Everybody's getting out of the way. Better close it quick. Thud!

KABOOOOMMM!!!!!

"Aaagghh!!!" Holy. That didn't just happen.

"Oh my God Clayton. That was the funniest thing I've ever seen. Your face just about fell off when those doors dropped."

"How'd you guys do that?"

"They're gonna change the lockers this week so we decided to get, you know, a bit

of a head start. We just took all the doors off and hooked em up so they'd fall off when you closed your locker. Pretty funny huh! Should've seen your face. I can die a happy man now."

"You scared the hell out of me. You guys had me worried. I gotta tell you I didn't know what to think. Not too shabby boys. Very funny. Creative. I think you've got too much time on your hands Ross."

"What can I say? Genius has to find an outlet. We were going to have your locker burst into flames but we couldn't find the right stuff. Anyway, we're saving the real good gags for the rookies."

"Yeah I bet. Anyone want to come and hit the weights with me or are you too busy planning your next caper?"

"Nah. We're heading over to get some food. Have a good workout and try not to knock any doors off when you leave."

"See you jokers later." One of these days those guys are going to kill someone. I just hope it's not me. Get changed and head down to the physio clinic to see Jerry for a few minutes. I might as well get a head start on our strength program. I hope he's kicking around.

Physio

Physio once again. Another day another dollar. It's a good thing I don't have to pay for this, I'd be living below the poverty line. What kind of torture is Jerry gonna put me through today? At least he'll be glad to hear I didn't play on the weekend, I should tell him I hurt my glutes from sitting on the bench so long. I wonder who'll be in there today?

"Hey Jerry!"

"Danny. You can sit down in that cubicle over there. I'm going to take you through some movements and check your strength and flexibility, all right. So try and resist me. Hmmmm. Okay. It's coming along a little better Danny. I still think you need to stay off of it as much as possible for the next while. Did you talk to your coach?"

"Yeah. He was pretty understanding. He gave me last week off. Most boring

time of my life watching all weekend. I think he'll let me take it easy for practice this week but he wants me to be in the line up this weekend. We're playing U.B.C. and Victoria to start off so if we want to be in a good position for playoffs we really need a sweep."

"Well, if I see you all week and you promise to take it easy in practice I think we can get you back in running order. That rest seemed to do you some good. I think another week could just about fix you up."

"God that's good to hear. I can't handle watching much longer. It's like pulling teeth, I just want to be out there playing. So what am I doing today?"

"I'll be getting you to warm up again for the first twenty minutes on the bike. After that I've got some exercises and then the ultrasound to speed up the healing process. I also want you to do that set of exercises I gave you last week two times a day now, once in the morning and once at night. I'll need to see you the rest of the week and we'll keep on with the heat and stimulation treatments. Okay."

"I guess. Should I bring an overnight bag, I'm gonna be in here all week anyway." Get started biking. Riding the bike isn't much better than sitting on the bench. At least I'm doing something. Aha there's a familiar face. "Hey Clayton! What are you doing in here? I thought you were the war horse of the volleyball team?"

"Danny. How you doing? Jeez man. Have you ever had a day when you weren't hurt."

"Now that just wouldn't be right. I'm working on my hip. Same injury from the end of indoor season last year. I keep aggravating it. Jerry's starting to get a little ticked at me. He thinks I'm doing this on purpose so I can miss classes."

"I wouldn't doubt it for a second. I think it's more likely that you just want to check out the girls in here."

"Maybe. I can't tell a lie. So what are you doing in here?"

"I'm starting a strength program that Jerry puts together for the team every year. It's what kept me injury free for the last three years."

"No kidding. I could've used that back when I was in high school. We're so busy

fixing me all the time I can't do any preventative stuff. Jerry's gonna put his kids through school by the time I'm done playing."

"So you guys are playing this weekend eh! Road trip to Vancouver. How's it look?"

"Pretty good. We've got a good group of rookies, it'll be a tough series but I think we can pull it off."

"Well good luck this weekend but I've gotta run. I don't have a lot of time to get at the weights before practice. Take care eh! I'll see you around."

"All right Clayton, later." How can he go three years without getting injured? That doesn't happen too often in university sport. He's one lucky guy. I can't remember a day where I wasn't hurt.

"Danny. Are you done all the exercises? Okay? All right, I'm going to hook you up to the ultrasound now. Listen up, you know how this thing works right so I don't have to explain it again right? Okay. Here's the deal. I've got a spot every morning at 10:00 or else you can come in at 2:30. Other than that I'm booked solid, it's been crazy in here."

Hmmmm. I can't make that afternoon slot, too close to practice. And if I take the morning slot I'll miss class on Tuesday and Thursday. Ahh, it's only for this week, it's early yet anyway. I'm not going to miss that much. "Yeah put me down for the rest of the week at 10:00. Thanks Jerry." Ah, the sweet pain of ultrasound.

Missed it again. My timing's all off. Not connecting right. I'm definitely early on these. I'm smacking that thing everywhere except into the court. Just give it some time. It'll kick in soon. I probably shouldn't have lifted weights right before practice. Definitely messing me up a bit. It felt good though. I pushed a lot of weight, I haven't lifted that much since last summer. If I can just turn it into something good on the court. I'm moving so slow. It doesn't make sense, I'm lifting more than ever but I feel like I'm ground bound. Same thing every year. I'm in great shape but I haven't been playing. It's gonna take a while to get into game shape.

"Clayton. Come here for a second."

"You're late. Start your approach earlier. Forget about hitting so hard, just start a

little bit earlier. Once the timing gets down you'll hit with power. Okay."

"All right. I'll give it a shot coach."

That was a great class today. Too much reading assigned but it looks interesting. I can try and get at some studying tonight after practice. I can't forget to tell Edwards and Kovac I'll be missing class on Friday. Do that before I go home. I'm not winning any points in those courses. Two days missed in little over a week and a half of school. Not good. I'll need to put some time in on those. I've gotta remember to sign up for a lab section for next week too. That shouldn't take too long. I'll still have enough time to head home and get some food. Two hours until practice. I can even get in a decent nap.

How much longer are we going to work on these systems? I get it already. I wish everyone could get it together, the system's easy. I want to get in some straight game time or some shooting or something. No point complaining, sprints are coming later so enjoy this while I can. I guess the better we have the system down the better we'll play. I can't wait for the weekend, our first league game of the season. I wonder what it's going to be like? How much will I play? Nerves are building up already and there's still three days until we leave.

First Game Jitters

Nerves, nerves, nerves. Please let me have a big game. I just want to get on the field, touch the ball. Lot's of folks here. They must have a lot of soccer fans in Victoria. Maybe there's nothing else going on. Wow. There's a lot of girls here. Hope I look okay. Oh man butterflies are huge. I think I'm going to puke. Calm down. Get it together. What if I throw up in front of everyone? If I could just get up and start moving around a bit. I need to move. This is taking forever. How many times is coach going to go over the system. We know it, we know what to do. What I don't know is when do we actually get out there? I'm seriously gonna puke soon. How can I get so nervous before a game? He's done. All right here we go.

Making the Ferry

"He just about smoked that guy coming around the bend. Did you guys see that? I thought he was going to kill him." I wonder if this thing's got seat belts. Twenty

minutes to catch the last ferry, we 're cutting this pretty close. This guy must've been a race car driver before he started driving buses. I just hope we get there alive. I don't care if we make the last ferry or not, I just want to see another day.

Whew! I thought we'd never make it. What a rush. I think coach probably had a heart attack. Half the girls are still glued to their seats. I'm so glad we only come out here once a year. If we had to do this every week I think I'd quit playing. That must've been some kind of speed record. We got off the field at quarter after four, the team showered, got on the bus, and we made it to the ferry about ten seconds to five. My hair's still wet. Hopefully I can get something decent to eat on the ferry. I'm starving. Nothing like a quick brush with death to get the old appetite going. I'm glad we made it. The night life in Victoria isn't exactly jumping. We should have a good time in downtown Vancouver tonight. I wonder where we'll go?

"How's the hip?"

"Oh hey Pete. It's doing okay. Thanks for asking. You had some awesome plays out there today. Nice couple of goals you got."

"Well you gave me a great feed off that first goal. You can give me those kinds of passes all year long. So you've been playing a long time now huh?"

"Yeah, this is my fourth year, I'm starting to get too old to play. My body's slowing down."

"What are you talking about. Even with your hip acting up you're kicking butt. I heard you used to play Pro."

"For a little while. Nothing major, it was fun while it lasted but I don't miss it. I had my kick at it."

"How was it?"

"Tough. Really tough, it's a business pure and simple. Great players, great teams, but it's all business, you have to produce or you're out. It gets to you after a while. There's not as much pressure in University. Doing school is hard but it's worth it. You get some schooling and meet some people from outside of sport. I wouldn't trade this for anything. What do you think of things so far? This is your first year of school right?"

"Yeah, my first year. I like it. I mean it's hard to tell it's only been a week, but I like it. It's a lot of work so far and I'm not really comfortable with classes yet but I feel pretty good about things."

"Well just try and keep on top of it from the start. Work has a habit of piling up in a hurry right when you don't need it. Not that I've done great in school or anything but I've learned that much at least."

"It's happening already. I've got a bunch of readings to do for Monday."

"It doesn't get any easier, at least not until the season's over, or if you just don't care."

"I heard some of the guys talking about going to Nationals? So what do you think? Do we have a chance?"

"Yeah. I mean it's early, but this is probably the most talented team we've had since I've been here, but there's a long way to go yet. A lot can happen. But we've got a good start, it's not too often we come out of B.C. with two wins, speaking of which we'll be hitting the town in Vancouver tonight. Are you coming out."

"I can't wait."

Headlines

"Pete, did you see the paper?"

"Not yet. What's in there?"

"They did a story on us, you know, our first games in B.C.."

"Does it show the standings for the other teams?"

"Yeah but that's not important. They actually wrote a bit about us, you and me!"

"What are you talking about Mark?"

"I mean they interviewed coach and he talked about the team. Look, I'll read it to you okay, '. . . We have a strong core of new rookies led by Peter Kerr and Mark Price. I'm expecting good things from both of these players based on their performance in the pre-season tournament and our games against U.B.C. and Victoria. Peter had a pair of goals on the weekend, he's got a real strong scoring touch and Mark works about as hard as anyone I've ever coached. Mark's a smart mid-field player and with Peter at striker we

have a better offence than last year. I think we've got a real good shot of having it all come together this season . . . '. Cool huh! The rest of it is pretty dull, just about the team getting off to a good start. What do you think?"

"It's all right I guess. It doesn't really mean anything. What else is coach supposed to say? It's not like he's going to say anything bad about the team. Anyway it's what we do on the field that matters."

"Yeah. It's just cool to have your name in the paper."

Mid-Season

A Week in the Life

Tuesday (Sport Keeps School Sane)

Can't wait to get in there. What a lousy day. I didn't understand anything from class today. That course tires me out. It just frustrates me to have to sit and listen to him. I still can't make heads or tails out of anything that's said. Quit complaining, at least I like my other classes, I guess I can struggle through this one and then it's over forever. Forget about it for now, focus on volleyball. It's going to feel good to get a workout in, build up a sweat, get rid of some tension.

The team room. Sweet sanctuary. Feels like a second home. I guess I'm in here enough it should feel that way. Wow. I'm the first one here. There's a switch. I hope I've got some gear in my locker. Nothing clean, guess I'm wearing yesterdays stuff. Get dressed, taped and get out there. Leave all the garbage behind and have a good practice. Can't wait to get started today. I wonder how everyone else is doing?

Boom. Boom. Boom.

"Darlene! I thought I was the first one here."

"Hiya Candace. I just got here. Last class was cancelled and I thought I'd come in early and work on a few things?"

"I didn't see anyone in the team room, I must've just missed you."

"Actually I was down there about an hour ago. I did some weights first and then I came up. You're looking pretty frazzled."

"Yeah. It's been a long day. All I want to do is pound the ball."

"I know what you mean. I have those days too. Sometimes I can't wait to get in here. It's kind of like my safe place. I come in and forget about everything else that's going on. It helps me stay sane when school starts getting crazy. Which it is right now. You want to warm up?"

"Yeah, maybe we can get in some hitting before coach gets down here. You know I wish the season would start. A month and a half of training and we still have two weeks to go before regular season starts. It'd be nice if we could get in some more exhibition games. Did you know that the soccer team is half done already? They're gonna be at Nationals in a month, we'll have only played two league games by then."

"Yeah it kind of sucks training for this long. I start getting really burned out by Christmas."

"Well I'm getting antsy. I just want to start the season. I'm so sick of practicing . . . no, that's not even it. I want to play another team, you know, see what we can do against them. I love playing in a game. When everything's on the line and I have to make it count the first time. I love the challenge of it. Practice just seems so artificial sometimes, you know. If we make a mistake we do it again. I like the rush from playing with real pressure and letting everything happen. Wind me up and put me out, I want to see what I can do."

"Don't you get nervous about playing, or making mistakes?"

"Yeah, of course, I mean sometimes the pressure gets to me, but I love playing. I wouldn't put myself through all of this if I didn't love to play."

Wednesday

"Hey Clayton, you're home. I haven't seen you in a while. How's things?"

"Good I guess. What's everyone up to?"

"They're just in the living room, watching T.V., some show about gangsters. We're heading out to shoot some pool later, ya wanta tag along?"

"Love to, but I can't, I'm way too tired to do anything. I need to get some laundry

done for the weekend. We're heading off to Calgary. We're doing a little tune up tournament before the regular season begins. I need to get a tonne of stuff done before we leave Friday morning that I haven't started. I've got a paper due next Tuesday and I don't even know what I'm going to write about yet."

"All right, your loss. All the boys will be there."

"Yeah, well nothing new for me I guess. It has been a while since we've done anything. Maybe I could come out for a bit. It's not like I don't want to come it's just that I've got so much to do. I'll think about it. See how I'm feeling in an hour. When are you guys planning on going?"

"We were thinking around ten. We're gonna hit the pub afterwards and have a few drinks. It's Ken's birthday."

"Oh yeah, Ken's birthday. Sounds like fun . . . but I better pass. That'll be pretty late and I've been having a hell of a time at school lately. I can't stay awake at all. Coach has been killing us the last couple of weeks and I haven't been able to keep up. He's on a huge fitness kick. He thinks that's what hurt us last year. I haven't studied since we started this training regimen. It seems like all I've been doing is training and sleeping. I've gotta get caught up."

"Are you sure? This might be the last time you see Ken for a while. He got a job back home working in the town office. He's not even sure if he's going to come back. He was talking about taking some time to do some travelling after he was finished. Something about going to Australia."

"Wow, no kidding. I guess I haven't talked with him in a while. I've been pretty focused on everything that's been going on with the team and school and . . . well, maybe I can come out for a bit, but it can't be too long."

"All right, I'll tell Ken. We'll come and get you when we're ready to go."

I guess I better get at it. Try and do some laundry first. Room looks like a disaster area. It'll be good to see Ken. I sure wish they weren't doing this until next week. I sure hope I can get everything done for this week.

Thursday

Lack of sleep. Dozing off. Not enough sleep. I shouldn't have gone out, but I haven't seen those guys in so long. It was great seeing everyone again, especially Ken. I can barely keep my eyes open. Maybe I should just head home and take a nap. I can't even focus on my text. Nah, just put my head down for a little while. That's it, a quick little snooze, fifteen minutes and then I'll get back at it . . .

Ahhhh! Much better. Just what I needed. A quick little cat nap. I wonder what time it is? Oh shit! Three hours. I slept for three hours!! No way. I missed my last class. This is not good. I needed to be there today to find out what's on the mid-term. I'm in deep trouble now. I had to finish those readings for tomorrow too. I'm gonna have to do everything after practice now. What a drag. I can't believe it! That pretty much blew my whole day. I hope coach cuts things short tonight. I'm gonna need all the time I can get. How'd I ever let myself do that. I should know better than that. I shouldn't have went out last night.

The common bond. "How'd your paper go Sara?"

"Not bad I guess. Class average was sixty. I only got a seventy-two. That guy marks really hard."

"Maybe you should get Greg to give you a little help, or is that the problem? Too much Greg and not enough school."

"Hey !! Quit that. I haven't even had time to see Greg. We haven't done anything in a week. I just don't have any time. I'm tired after practice. The last thing I want is to be going out. I mean, he's been real sweet and all but, I don't know, it's just real hard to be around him right now. I don't think he 's taking it very well. He keeps calling and I'm too tired to even talk."

"I know what you mean. Dillon and I've been having problems too. He just doesn't seem to understand what it's like. I don't know how to tell him I can't be with him. He's getting mad because I say I'm too busy to spend time with him and then we do all this team stuff. I can't explain it. I mean the team stuff is important. I can't miss it . . .

Speaking of which, next Friday we're having a team potluck at my place. It should be a lot of fun. We're going to pick names for Secret Buddies."

"What do you mean?"

"Come on, you know. It's like a secret Santa. Everyone on the team picks a name and we get things for each other throughout the year. It's just supposed to be for a little bit of fun, keeps everyone positive, builds some team spirit."

"Oh yeah. I've never heard of that before, kinda sounds like a good idea. Hey do you ever get . . . I don't know . . . tired of hanging out with everybody. I mean sometimes it feels like we see each other all the time."

"Sort of. Nothing serious. I like being around everyone most of the time. But yeah, it is a lot of time to spend together."

"I know what you mean. It's not like I get sick of anybody. I just can't believe how close we've all become. It seems like I'm always with the team."

"The season's only three months. It's not really enough time for me to get sick of anyone. I really love being part of the team. If I need time I just go off on my own for a bit. Actually I kind of miss everyone when the season's over. I've got lots of friends and everything, but it's just not the same thing with them . . . Don't get me wrong, I wouldn't trade them for the world, but it's different. I mean, I can come in here and somehow it's, I don't know how to describe it, it's peaceful I guess. Going through what we go through. I just know that I can come in here and everyone understands what it's like. I'm tired, so's everyone else. I'm stiff, so's everyone else. I'm busy, so's everyone else. I don't have to say anything. I mean, we're all going through it. We all have to go out there and deal with the physical effort of training. I don't really know how to explain it, but it feels good to be around everyone."

"Like a common bond."

"Yeah. I guess that's it, a common bond."

Friday (Falling Behind)

Finally home. Need some food. "Hey man."

"Pete! How you doing there big guy? You're looking pretty tired. I made some spaghetti if you want some. You gotta do the dishes though."

"Yeah. Thanks, I'm beat. I didn't feel like making anything anyway. Zero energy. I just want to eat and pass out."

"How'd practice go? We saw the football team on the news. When are they going to put you guys on?"

"I guess as soon as we win a National championship. That or we start bringing in the crowds. What'd they have to say about the football guys?"

"Nothing really. It was kind of stupid. They just talked about training in the fall. How cold it gets and stuff like that. Is it too cold for you guys? Do you want some blankets or something for tommorrows practice?"

"Funny man. I think I'll be okay. I could use more time in the day. I'm falling behind like crazy. You think you could swing that?"

"Yeah. We could all use a little more time. What are you talking about though? You're the one guy I know who's organized."

"I wish . . . I always feel like I'm behind. I'm constantly running from one thing to the next. It's kind of like that dream where you're running after something as fast as you can but it feels like your feet aren't moving. No matter how hard you run you just can't catch up. You end up running forever. I mean all I do is soccer, school, eat and sleep. I practice I come home eat, shower, study and go to bed. My whole life is planned out. Sometimes I envy you guys. I wish I could just mess around for a day or two. You know, take a night off, skip practice and just hang out."

"I don't envy your schedule, that's for sure, but it's not all roses here either you know. Speaking of which I need to get down to the library el pronto. I'll see you later."

"Yeah, later. Thanks for the spaghetti." I should really be used to this routine by now. It's not like I have a lot to figure out. I've just got to make sure I get everything done. It just gets tough fitting everything in around practice, workouts and games. I know when all that stuff is so I should be fine. So why does it seem like I'm always

running around trying to figure out what's next? I love playing, and practice and stuff is okay, it's the rest of the day that gives me a headache. How do I finish all my readings? It sure would be a lot easier if I didn't care about school. Like Jesse. He just runs everything around soccer. I don't even know if he goes to classes. Either he's a genius or an idiot. I wonder how he stays in school doing that? Someone said he just about got the Dean's vacation last year. I'd never want to it to get that out of hand. I don't think I could handle not playing. I like school but if I couldn't play I don't think I'd stay.

Saturday (The Road Trip)

Riding the bus. All packed and ready to go. Make sure and bring some clothes for Saturday. I wonder if I should bring some homework. I've got that paper due on Tuesday. Well, I'll bring a couple of things, maybe get some work done on the bus. I've got the soccer bag, better double check and make sure I didn't forget anything. Cleats, jersey, shorts, socks, walkman. Eveything's set.

Here we go. Find a good seat in the middle of the bus. Get away from the coaches up front but I don't want to sit too far back or I'll hit the three ring circus. Plug in the walkman. Tune out for a while. Maybe get some sleep. I gotta play a good solid game tonight. Maintain my focus. I'm getting every ball in my area. No one is beating me. I'm going to dominate the field. I can't believe I let that jerk stop me last week. Play keeps going through my head over and over. We would've won. I'm way better than he is. I just lost focus for a second. I'm going to kick his ass this weekend. He'll be wishing he never started playing this game. Last thing I needed was Dom telling me that I screwed up. Man that guy has got a big ego. I wonder if he's ever seen himself play? He talks big, but for someone who's played four years of university soccer he sure isn't that strong a player. I wish he'd just leave us rooks alone. I don't know what I did to him but he sure gets his nose in my business a lot. Guy's got some kind of complex. Great. Speak of the devil.

"Hey rook!"

"Dom." Putz.

"Getting ready for the big game. You better not screw up like last time. We would've won that game. In fact, I don't know why coach is playing you at all. Anybody else would've made that play."

I guess that's why you sat out half of the game. "Thanks for the info Dom. I'll keep it in mind next time. You must be getting pretty good at analyzing the game with all the time you've been spending sitting on the bench." That'll shut him up for a bit.

"Good one rook. Keep your head up. Your time's coming soon rook."

Whatever. Loser. 'Keep your head up', that's all those two clowns ever say. 'Keep your head up', it must've taken him and Ciccone about three year's to dream up that gem. They're gonna nail me for sure, might as well try and get them to do it soon, get it over with. I bet they've got something horrible in mind. Concentration's shot now. We must be close to our first stop soon. What's going on around the bus? Boys in back are playing cards. Some of the girls are talking. Man those guys are loud. You'd think they were a mile apart the way they're screaming at each other. They keep teasing Theresa. Then there's everybody in the middle. A few people talking, most of them are listening to music. Bookworms up front. How does Matt get any studying done in here? I can barely think straight with my walkman on. Maybe I should do some work. Maybe not. It looks like we're pulling in somewhere.

"Okay everybody needs to be back on the bus by quarter to four so you've got fifteen minutes. The bus will leave on time so make sure you're back on board."

Coach needs to relax a bit. I'm starving. Gotta hit the bathroom. Get some fresh air. Maybe chat with Mark a bit. Stretch my legs out too. These seats are a lot uncomfortable after a while.

"Pete. I heard some of the guys talking. I think they're gonna get some of the rookies tonight. I heard your name. So watch out huh! I'm gonna stay way out of their way."

"Well I hope they do it. Get it over with, maybe that way those two clowns'll stop bothering me. How bad can it be anyway? I don't think the other guys would let it get

too crazy."

"I wouldn't count on it man. All I know is I'm staying under cover tonight. I don't want anything to do with it."

Here we go. Three more hours and then we can finally get ready to play. Maybe I'll catch some sleep for the rest of the way. What's going on up there?

"This tastes rotten."

"Yeah, mine too. I think this ice cream's bad."

"I wouldn't eat that if I was you Kerry. Ours is bad. It smells funny."

"Mine seems okay. What do you mean it smells funny?"

"Can't you smell it? Come hear, take a sniff."

Splat. "Ahh. You jerks!!"

Brilliant. I can't believe Kerry fell for that! She's gonna be pissed. Man that was rude, but it was hilarious. How can Todd and Sam get away with stuff like that?

"Kerry. I'm gonna sit up front. I need to get some work done. I'm so far behind already. I can't afford to get any further back. I've got a test on Wednesday next week and I haven't even started to think about it."

"Okay Sara, just watch out for the Neanderthal convention on the way up front."

I don't know why I even bring homework on these trips sometimes. It's nearly impossible to study on the bus. All those idiots in the back. Too many distractions. Who wants to study on the bus anyway? The things lurching all over the place, the light is brutal, as soon as you start to get something done someone comes up to ask you something. I'll have to try and get some work done at the hotel again. I wish I had a little more time to get at my school work. These road trips are killer. I can't afford to get much further behind. I'll have to get some work done when we get back on Sunday night too. I've gotta catch up by Monday or I'm in trouble. Make sure I get a good sleep tonight and try to find a place to do some work. Maybe they'll have an extra room or something that I can study in. I better try and get in a couple of hours tomorrow after the walk.

Life at the hotel. "Did you get any studying done?"

"Yeah a couple of hours. I couldn't concentrate though. I think I only read about two pages. I ended up talking with Sara for a bit. What about you?"

"Are you kidding me?!! I haven't moved since supper. I got some sleep. I had to catch up from last night. Anyway, I haven't studied once on game day this year, I'm not starting now."

"The game's over now Pete."

"I know. Why mess with something that's working for me? It might jinx our play if I start studying after games. Anyway, I'm either too wired or too tired on game day, even when we're done. I wouldn't be able to concentrate on school work."

"So why do you keep bringing your books?"

"I don't know. I feel like I should. Everyone else does and I think it eases my conscience. You know you're the only one who actually studies on the road. You know, besides some of the girls. I don't know how you do it. Awesome game though eh? I can't stop thinking about it. I hope we play that well tomorrow. We had some great plays out there. I think that was your best game of the year Mark."

"Yeah. It felt pretty good. Things are clicking right now. Earlier in the year I felt slow, you know. Now though everything is working for me. I've got my timing down perfect and I feel like I could run forever during a game. I felt great today."

"Yeah it sure showed. You were in prime form. Danny was looking pretty rough eh! I think his hip is getting worse. I don't think he's told coach that it's still bothering him."

"He doesn't have to tell him. You have to be blind not to notice. He's slowing down a lot on the field. He's not as aggressive on the ball either, he just can't seem to get there in time. I hope he rests it. We need him for the playoffs."

"Yeah. I don't know how we'd do if he wasn't able to play."

"Hey let's see what the guys are doing. I can only talk about the game for so long. It seems like we've been in this room for hours now."

"Sounds good. I'm bored stiff. There's nothing to do around here."

"No kidding. I heard some of the guys talking about going out for a while but I think coach put a curfew on us. We're supposed to stay in the hotel."

"No. I think we can go out but we have to be back in the hotel by 11:00 and lights out by 12:00 o'clock. We have to go for a team walk at seven tomorrow morning."

"We have to get up when? For a team walk? Oh man that bites! Walking at 7:00 in the morning. I'm not looking forward to that. We don't even play until 2:00 o'clock. Why on earth do we have to do that? I could sure use the sleep instead of getting up. Might as well be locked in here. We can't do anything and get back by curfew."

"No kidding. Maybe we should check with the girls and see what they're doing. I kind of want to talk to Michelle, she was saying they might watch a movie."

"Mark my man! Are you making the moves?"

"No. I mean she's nice, but I don't know her that well yet. I just want to talk with her a bit, see what she's like."

"All right. Whatever you say. Let's head over there then. You know you're gonna get bugged like crazy."

"Whatever Pete. I'm not doing anything. I'm just talking."

"Okay. If that's the way you want to play it. You can say whatever you want. I know the truth man. Let's go."

Riiinnngg . . . Riiinnngg . . .

"I'll get it Mark. Hello."

"Pete. Where are you? Didn't anyone tell you. We're having a quick striker's meeting. We've got to go over a couple of things for tomorrow. Get down here right away. Coach is waiting for you. Room 204."

"Uh. Yeah okay Donnell." What's that all about? A striker's meeting. I've never heard of that before. I better see what's going on. "Mark. Why don't you just head over to Michelle's room. I've got to stop by Donnell's room for a quick striker's meeting."

"A what?"

"A striker's meeting. Yeah I know. I've never heard of it before. Coach has probably got some stupid new thing he wants to try out tomorrow. I'll pop over as soon as I'm done."

"All right. I'll see you there."

The rookie tour. I hope this doesn't take long. What are we going to talk about anyway? Here I am. Door's open.

"Hurry up Pete. We're waiting for you."

"Yeah. I'm here. Hold your shorts." Huh. Lights went out. Wait a second. What's happening? Whuff. Uhh. "What's going on? What are you guys doing?"

"Hey rook. It's about time you got here. You're getting a little initiation tonight."

Dom. Great. So here it is. I might as well go along with things. Maybe I can get in a few shots before they finish.

"Hold him down boys. Don't try anything funny rook, you don't have a chance. All right get his clothes boys. Gag him. Hurry up let's get him in there."

A fold up bed. These guys are putting me in a fold up bed. That's not so bad.

"We're just gonna take you on a little trip here rook. We'd like to show you the sights, maybe introduce you to a few of the hotel guests. Shall we hit the girls floor first here guys? Yeah I think so. Are you having fun yet Petey, 'cause we're just getting started. Come on out girls we've got some hotel equipment for you. I think we should visit with the girls for a bit here Pete. What do you think? What's that? Oh how nice of you to volunteer to watch the bed for us. What's that? You'll just stay out here in the hall and watch it. Okay. You know, once we're done here we'd like to take you down to the lobby and show some of the new guests around. So we'll take you there in a while. After that we're thinking it might be a good idea if you took a quick tour of the parking lot. Maybe you can stay out there for a while and think about tomorrow's game. What do you think? You like that eh!"

Sunday

The morning walk. Phones ringing. What time is it? 6:45?!!! Man, can't open my eyes. Legs are killing me. We need a masseuse. I think I'll talk to coach about that. I'm having a good year, can I get a personal massage therapist? I'd play even better coach but I can't move my legs so a massage before games would really help. Hah! That'll go over well. My own fault. I should have stretched more last night. Just too tired. All I wanted to do was sleep after the game. That bus ride really tired me out. This team walk thing is crazy. I don't even think it's light out yet. 'The walk makes sure everyone is awake and functioning a full three hours before you play. If you don't give the body three hours to wake up you're not functioning at your best possible level'. Blah, blah, blah. Coach must've learned that in the army or something. His math's pretty weak. We don't play 'til two, but we have to be up by seven. Gee, I don't know? That might be a few more than three hours. Power trip. I don't think they trust us not to party. Drag myself out of bed to walk around the block. Sadistic. I really can't stand getting up for this. We don't do this at home. I don't see why we have to do this when we're on the road? We just go back to sleep afterwards anyway.

I think I ate too much at breakfast. Feel like slug boy. Legs are still stiff. I really need to start stretching more. Slept two more hours after the walk, still dead to the world. That seven a.m. thing is gonna kill me by the end of the season. It didn't help that I was out in the parking lot for half the night. Good guy Mark. Thank God he found me. Two hours out there was more than enough. I can just imagine if he hadn't . . . 'Rookie initiation goes bad: Soccer player freezes to death left naked in fold away bed'. My parents would croak if they heard that. I just hope no one saw me out there. Mark seems more freaked out about it than me. Sure worried about getting rooked, last night really bothered him. I don't think anybody'll do it to him. At least it's over for me.

Looks like everyone else is up. I definitely need more sleep, I never seem to get enough on these trips. Maybe I'll crawl back into bed. Better not. I might as well get ready now before we head off to the field. If I go back to bed again I'll never get up.

Have a shower, make sure I've got everything for the game. Put my walkman back in the bag. Gotta have my tunes ready, keep my focus on the game. I don't need to be distracted by what everyone else is doing. It's going to be a lot tougher game today. We'll have to play stronger defense if we want to steal the a second win in here. We've can get some payback for letting them beat us at home last week. Better keep my head up today too. Jurassin's gonna be looking for blood after I beat him twice yesterday. He's almost as bad as Ciccone. No, he's worse, I don't have to play against Ciccone. It's nice having a guy like that on your side during the game but it sucks everywhere else. I wonder if Jurassin's teammates hate him as much as we do? I wonder if they hate him as much as we hate Cic?

Holding on. We've just got to hold on now. One goal lead, maybe a couple of minutes left. Let's just keep putting the pressure on. Man are they playing a lot better than yesterday. We worked them last night. They must've gotten a big time talk. Get focused. Okay, just move the ball up the field. Shit, come on guys don't give it away. Watch out for the guy coming down the middle. There can't be much time left. When's the ref going to blow the whistle. We've got to be out of injury time by now. Oh no, whooo. That was a close one. I just about didn't get there in time. I can't get full extension on that leg. My hip's too tight. I'm gonna be in some major pain after this game. Call it off of them. Call it off of them. Shit. Guess that was hoping for too much. Corner kick. Come on time. Run out! Ref's letting them kick it. Ball don't come near my guy, there's no way I can get in the air another time. Here it is. Can't jump. No! He touched it Where'd it go? Oh man. Out. That was way to close. Did Mark touch it? No. All right! It was off them. Okay goal kick. Take your time, just boot it way down there, get it out of our half. Good kick. Let our forwards take it. Eat up some time. Yes!! The whistle, finally. I thought he was never going to end this thing. Man did they get a couple of good chances at the end there. The ref must've added on a good ten minutes of injury time, sure seemed like it anyway. Why does it always feel like the clock is going slow motion when we've got a one goal lead?

"All right gentlemen. Great game out there today. Nice job of handling the pressure at the end. I was very impressed with our defense today. Danny, Cic, you guys had a great game. Everyone else looked to be in top form. Well done. I just want to remind you that we won't be going for supper until after the ladies finish playing. Make sure you pack up all your gear because we've got to leave the room immediately. And guys . . . lets make sure we leave the place clean. I mean spotless. I don't want any problems like we had last time. So get showered and get out to cheer on the ladies."

I don't think I can wait three hours before eating. I'm gonna starve. I need to find something before the girls finish or I'm not gonna make it. I hate watching the girls play. The only good thing about watching is checking out the other team. I want to get another look at number Ten. She was hot. Not like anything is going to happen there. We only see them twice a year. I just want to eat and get some sleep. Get the trainer to look at my hip again. I barely made it through the end of that. Time sure drags when we play first. Look at the bright side, we won, it'd be one heck of a long trip back if we had lost. At least I can get some proper treatment for my hip.

"Good game there Danny."

"I played better than yesterday anyway. That was a nice win today. They played a lot stronger. Time couldn't go fast enough. We had a couple of close calls. I thought for sure they were going to get one at the end there. It felt like the ref was letting us play an extra half or something. Sure better than last week huh?"

"Yeah. I'd rather be leading than trailing. It was nice to get a little revenge, beat them in their own barn. I still think we got short changed at home last week. There's no way we played the injury time last Sunday. Time just flew. A couple of more minutes and I know we could've tied it up. At least we got two wins this weekend."

"Yeah. We're looking good now. We're at least tied with U Vic., we just have to hope that Calgary beat them, then we can pretty much guarantee first place."

"I hope so. It'd be nice to have a playoff spot wrapped up before the end of the season."

Getting home. Finally. I can't wait to have a shower. I always feel so gross after getting off the bus. At least I got a little sleep. The guys must have been really tired, they hardly made any noise on the way back. Just be glad, that'll probably never happen again. Still, that bus ride sucks. I always feel so bagged afterwards. I need to get some studying done tonight too. I didn't do enough on the road. Can't forget about that test on Wednesday. Wonder how hard it's going to be?

"How was your trip dear?"

"Uhh, good."

"Did you play well? Did you get on the field a lot? Did you find some time to get some work done? I had a busy weekend myself. I had to go over to the Simpson's to babysit on Friday. Their baby is so sweet!"

"That's nice."

"Greg called earlier. He wanted you to call when you got in. He was wondering how you did."

"I'll call him tomorrow."

"He's your boyfriend dear. It sounded like he really wanted you to call him. I think he missed you. Oh, your brother's home. He went to that new show at the IMAX on Saturday. He said it was pretty good. Do you want something to eat? There's some leftovers in the fridge."

"I'm okay." Why is she telling me all of this? Can't she see that I'm tired. I just want to veg out. I can't deal with this right now. I need a little peace and quiet. " I'm going downstairs." I can't handle the twenty questions routine now. I'm too tired. I wonder what's on T.V. tonight. Just take a quick look before I have a shower. Hmmm . . . X-Files. I haven't seen this in a while. Maybe I'll watch a little bit before I hit the books. Creepy. This show is so weird. No, I better have a shower. Tired. Those trips take a lot out of me. I don't want to move. Couch is so cosy. Maybe I'll just watch the end of this and then have a shower and hit the books.

What's that sound? The t.v.? Oh no! I must've dozed off. I'm going to have to

make sure I do this in the morning. At least we don't have practice tomorrow. I'm sure going to need the day to get caught up. Oh, I forgot. We've gotta work that bingo tomorrow night. Jeez! Finally a day off and we have to work a stupid bingo. Bunch of old ladies screaming at me to bring them a new card. You need a gas mask to breath in there! Why couldn't we just have a day off? Better unpack everything and get my gear in the washing machine.

Monday (The Aftermath)

Does anyone know me?. Not a blessed soul knows me. You step out of the phys. ed. building and no one has a clue. Doesn't anyone care about their school? Stupid paper wrote two lines about us again. All they ever talk about is Men's hockey and basketball. Two articles on the demands of hockey and school, one on the next great basketball star. They've barely started the season. There are other sports around campus. I should go over there and give them something to write. Our team has the most Academic All-Canadians, we've made nationals three years in a row and all they can write is a stupid byline saying we beat Saskatchewan by two goals on the weekend. What's the point?

Player coach meetings. ". . . Thanks for coming in Sara. I hope that gives you some good feedback to go on for the next little while. As you can see there are still some areas that need to be worked on. I really want you to focus on what we've talked about over the next week of practices."

Always the critic. Just once I wish she'd give me some credit. She talks like you've done okay and then you see the grades and they don't even come close. Passing . . . needs improvement, shooting . . . adequate, defense . . . weak through midfield- needs to be more aggressive. I had a great weekend. I think that's the best I've played all year. I could use a little encouragement instead of all of that. How about 'good effort Sarah, that's the hardest you've worked all year'. I don't get it. Why does she even ask for our opinion? She never seems to agree with anything I say. It's such a big joke.

Charmed bonding. What a stupid meeting. That ruined my whole day. 'I want you to really focus for the next week of practices. You can give a lot more than you have

been'. It's so stupid. Is she just being hard on me or does she give everyone a bad evaluation? What's the point of those meetings anyway if you just feel lousy afterwards. I don't want to try harder. I am trying hard. Why can't she see that. I played great on the weekend. Stupid. Huh! What's this? Looks like something's taped to my locker. Wonder what it is? A note.

'Sara, this is a little something to bring you some luck. You've been playing so well I'm not sure you need it, but it'll help out for those really tough games or on the days when your not feeling so great. It has very powerful magic so be careful when you use it. Keep playing strong. Your Secret Soccer Buddy.'

I wonder who did this? I guess I can rule out coach.

"What you got there Sara?"

"I don't know. I just found it on my locker. It's from my Secret Buddy. It looks like some sort of candy in a boot. Oh neat they're soccer candies. They've got little sayings on them. 'You are a great shooter'. Hilarious. Is that ever cool"

"Hey, can I try one of those. I need all the help I can get. I've been playing brutal lately."

"Uh, yeah sure. Here's one. 'All Star'. How's that?"

"Thanks Sara. Sure hope it works."

"I didn't know you were superstitious."

"I'm not. But I'll try just about anything right now. Something's got to work 'cause I sure can't play much worse."

"Hang in there Libby. You'll turn it around. I'll even give you a full refund if it doesn't work." I hope she does all right. These candies are pretty cool. I wonder who got them for me. It's a great idea. I hope I can come up with some surprises that good for my Buddy. Awesome, at least someone appreciates what I've been doing.

<u>Getting Worried</u>

"I'm starting to get worried you know. I thought I heard some of the guys talking about it at yesterday's practice. I can't get rooked. I just . . . I don't know. I just don't

want it to happen. What if they get me? What am I gonna do? I don't want them doing anything crazy to me. Especially after what they did to you last weekend. I don't think I could take it."

"Don't worry about it Mark. Everyone loves you man. They're not going to do anything to you, least ways not if I can help it."

"What are you talking about Pete? They get everybody. It's tradition. You know they're not going to let me get away without getting nailed. I gotta do something to get out of it. They've got everyone else already. I'm the only one left. It's really only Dom and Ciccone I'm worried about you know, everyone else has been pretty good about it, but those two are going crazy. It's like they get off on it or something. They just love seeing people humiliated."

"Settle down Mark. There's only a few weeks left in the season. We can hold them off for the rest of the year. We're not going to let it happen to you man. You know we can't stand those guys. There's nothing we'd like better than to get one over on them. I know the rest of the rooks will help out. Just try to forget about it for a while. We'll come up with something."

"Thanks Pete. It would be great to stick it to those guys a bit. They've been riding us all year."

"Yeah, I know. They've been going at it with me pretty hard. I'd love to get those guys back even a little bit. This is perfect. Stopping them from getting you will ruin their year. I love it."

The Home Game

The Pregame Routine

Hmmm. That was a great sleep. I wonder what time it is? Nine. Perfect. Four hours before the game. Lots of time to get ready. Back's okay, no stiffness. I guess all I needed was a good nights sleep. Still a little tired. Maybe I'll just stay here for a while, listen to the radio. Nice warm blankets. The bed is so comfortable, I could just lie here all day. Nahh, I can't. I should get up and get going. Go see what's on television. I've

got a bit of time before I need to eat. Maybe I can catch most of Bugs Bunny before breakfast.

That was hilarious. I can't remember the last time I saw that. Starting to get hungry. Nine-thirty. Time to eat anyway. Head upstairs and see what's cooking.

"Hey mom. What's for breakfast?"

"We're having fruit and some oatmeal. Good energy food for your game."

"Thanks mom. It looks great."

"So. How do you think you'll do today? Who are you playing?"

"Lethbridge, so it should be pretty easy. It's almost too bad we have to waste the day playing against them. I'd almost rather take it off. It's kind of boring playing against them. I don't think they've won a game in three years. It's a good thing I'm not playing for them. I don't know how I could convince myself to come to the field everyday."

"People play for different reasons sweetie."

"Yeah, I guess. It'd just be so frustrating never winning. It's not even that really, I mean the games aren't even close. They get killed by everybody. It's gotta be hard to enjoy playing when you're not even in a game. Besides, nobody would be interested in what you're doing. You'd be working so hard for nothing. We think our home game turnouts are bad. I can't imagine anybody coming to watch one of their games."

"Well I guess you should consider yourself lucky that you're on a good team. Is that all you're going to eat? Is there something wrong with it?"

"No, it's good mom, I'm just trying to be a little more careful. I don't want too much. Last week I could barely move before the game. I had a stomach ache until half time. I don't want to go through that again. Besides, I'm gonna go get ready. Thanks for breakfast." Pack my gear and then have a shower. I hope I remembered to wash everything. Looks like it. I've got the socks, shorts, shirt. Where'd I put my shoes? There they are. Whoops, forgot to clean them. Not too bad, shouldn't take long to get them ready. All right, shower here I come.

Did that ever feel good. Nothing like a hot shower. Finish doing my hair and get

my stuff on then I can sit back and relax a bit before I head to the game. I've got about half an hour before I need to leave.

"Honey."

"Yeah mom, I'm down here!"

"Greg called while you were in the shower. He was just wondering what time you were going to pick him up, so I told him you should be there in about half an hour."

Pick up Greg? Oh no. I can't believe I forgot. Jeez, I better get going, it's going to take me twenty minutes to get to his place.

"Okay mom, I'm gonna leave now. Can you phone Greg and tell him I'm leaving and have him meet me outside. I'll see you later."

"Okay. Good luck dear. We'll see you after the game. Say hi to Greg for us."

"I will. Bye." I can't believe this. I was having such a good morning, now I'm rushing. I hope he's ready to go when I get there. He better be or I'm late. Driving half way around the city to pick him up. Like I don't have enough to think about on game day. Okay, grab my bag and jacket. All right I've got everything. I'm off.

Come on let's go, I'm gonna be late! What is taking him so long. Finally, all right walk a little faster, come on.

"Good morning. Nice to see you."

"Come on, hurry up and get in or we're gonna be late." What's he doing? Messing around out there. "Get in."

"Okay. I'm in already."

Okay, if traffic's good I'll be okay. Take the twenty third exit instead of Cannon road. That should save about five minutes. I wonder if I'll be playing mid or striker? Maybe Cheryl will play mid and I can move up, that'd be cool. I haven't played striker in weeks. I've got to make my runs sooner. I keep getting down field late and missing the pass. Gotta stop worrying about going offside, let the ref call it. Remember what coach said about being timid. If I'm gonna play striker I have to be aggressive. Make the defenders react with you, especially against Lethbridge, their defenders are so weak . . .

"You're really talkative today. You've said about two words since I got in the car."

"Huh. I'm driving all right. What do you want?"

"I just thought it might be nice if we said a few things to each other, that's all. I mean I haven't seen you in a few days."

"You know I've been busy. Now's not the time to talk about this. I'm trying to drive. We've only got ten minutes to get to the field, and anyway I told you this wasn't a good idea, that I'd be trying to concentrate on the game." I knew I shouldn't have picked him up. Why couldn't he just come on his own? I need to focus. I don't want to talk right now. I need my time to get ready.

"Yeah, I'm sorry. I just thought that maybe, you know, we could catch up for a few minutes or something. I wasn't expecting much, it's just that all you've been doing is soccer lately."

"We've talked about this before. You know how important this is to me. I just need a little space during the season. Now's really not the time to talk about this. I really do need to start thinking about the game. Maybe we can talk after."

"Yeah, sure. Whatever."

No Time to Think

Great, just great. I didn't get any time to myself to think about the game. That was a big mistake bringing Greg along. Too late now, I've just got to try and get focused, think about what's coming up. Maybe he's right though? I haven't really talked with him in a long time. Am I taking soccer too seriously? Arrghhhh! I can't be thinking like this right now. I've got a game to play. I guess it's a good thing it's only Lethbridge.

Get dressed and taped. I hope I remembered to bring those . . .

"Hey Sara! You ready to kick a little butt today? This is going to be a walk."

"I guess." Kick a little butt. No joke. How many goals has Lethbridge scored this year? One. This is going to be ugly. Greg probably wants to kick my butt about now. I hope he's not too mad.

"Hey are you in there? You look a little out of it. Something wrong?"

"Huh . . . Oh it's just . . . nothing. I mean . . . no it's nothing really. I was just thinking a bit. Greg and I were talking before the game. I was sort of mulling things over."

"Nothing serious is it?"

"No, no, nothing really. I was just quiet, you know, trying to get ready. He was just kind of upset because I wasn't saying anything."

"Listen. Don't worry about it. I'm sure Greg understands, he's a cool guy. Just talk to him about it after the game. I'm sure everything will be all right. If you want to talk about it later let me know."

"Thanks Libby, it's no big deal. It just got me thinking a little bit. I'm not worried about it. Anyway, I better get ready."

"Yeah, me too. We've only got a couple of minutes before coach gets in here. I'm kind of anxious about the line up. I sure hope she puts me in today."

"You will be. You had a great practice yesterday. I'm sure she'll put you in."

<u>The Pep Talk</u>

". . . Those are the players we really want to key on. Okay then, let's get out there and play our game. Let's try to keep focused. All right ladies, everyone remembers the line up? I'll go over it one more time . . . "

Another great pep talk down the drain. Sometimes I don't have a clue what coach is trying to get at. She just rattles on sometimes. Even when she says stuff that's inspiring it gets blown to hell because everyone's upset about who's playing. Poor Libby. I don't know why she isn't starting, she deserves a shot. We've got to change that. It just doesn't do us any good finding out who's going to play two seconds before the game. Creates too many problems. If she gave us a day or two of warning we could prepare a little better. There wouldn't be any surprises, everyone could get ready for the line up. At least Dr. B. had some good things to say. Most of that sport psych stuff he's been talking about this year makes sense. I really like that relaxation stuff.

The Game

Yeehaa! The big crowds keep on coming. What do we have? Maybe thirty people here. There's Greg, he doesn't look too happy. Better give him a wave. There's the guys team, they're half the crowd. And the other half? Looks like parents and boyfriends again. I wonder if anyone even knows we have a women' s team? Better turnout than it would be at Lethbridge. At least we get a little support. Ah well, I guess it doesn't matter. I'm not really here for the glory anyway. Still it'd be nice to have some fans once in a while.

Brrrr. I'm definitely leaving the suit on, it's freezing out here today. Must have a wind chill or something. A nice Arctic wind front. The joys of playing in Edmonton. I should've gone to the States. Sunny, warm, some appreciation. Whoa, stop day dreaming and take a reality check. I'd also be sitting on the bench all the time too. Okay, better get my head into warming up. Have a quick jog and start the passing drills.

Here we go. Take a couple of deep breaths, calm down. Why is it I'm always fine until the team cheer before I get a rush of nerves? Butterflies floating around down there, don't freak out. Remember what Dr. B said, this just means I'm getting ready to perform. If I control it I can use the energy for playing. A couple more deep breaths. All right, I'm ready. I wonder what it's like for the girls on the bench? Are they getting nervous too?

Feel good and warm. Shoes are tight, firm. Hole in the right side. They look weak. Defender's sitting too far back. Start my run. Ball, ball. Get under it. Got it. Too fast, it's skipping. Move, move. Control it. Stretch it out. Come on, push it. Damn, missed it. I should've had that ball. Where's the support? Not focused enough, get into the game. Getting winded, slow down a bit. Play's on the other side of the field, catch my breath. Where's the play going. Okay here comes the ball. Make my run. Perfect pass. Cross it in to Sharon. Come on Sharon take the shot. Yeah!!

"Nice shot!"

"Great pass Sara."

"Thanks eh! Five minutes and we've scored already. This is gonna be a

blowout."

"Yeah it could get ugly. What else should we expect? They're brutal. We'd have a better game playing against a high school team."

It's gonna be hard staying focused for the rest of this game. I should've been a little nicer to Greg this morning. I didn't really need to be that focused. If we were playing U. Vic. or somebody yeah, but not Lethbridge. I'd almost rather be studying or something. I wish they were a better team. It sucks having to play through this.

"We should've scored a few more by now. They're playing pretty good."

"Nah, no need to worry, we've got them. One goal will be enough. What do they have something like six goals all year. Anyway I'm sure we'll get a few more here in the second half. What should we do tonight? Has anyone got any ideas? Maybe we can go dancing."

"We should get back out there. The ref's waving at us to get going for the second half."

Wake Up Call

I can't believe this is happening. We're running out of time. I can't believe they tied it up. Come on get the ball up field. Let's go. Can't be more than a couple of minutes left. Hurry up!! We've gotta get it into their zone now. No time for fooling around. Just boot it up here.

That's about the longest walk of the year. I don't think anyone said anything. Heads down, everyone. I can't believe we didn't beat them.

"All right ladies. I want to talk to you for a few minutes. I watched both teams walk off the pitch today. One team was elated, proud. The other looked beaten, ashamed. Well you know something, your heads should be down. That was shameful. Not once this year have I seen our team look like you did today. Lethbridge, they looked good. They were relaxed but intense, everyone was talking. I could see right from the start today that you ladies weren't into the game. It all stemmed from our warmup. That was by far the worst warm up I have seen since I started coaching here. In fact I think

that was the worst warmup I've ever seen anywhere. Lethbridge on the other hand, they looked sharp in warmup. You could tell they were ready to play today. To me it looked like all of you would rather have been at home watching cartoons or something. You definitely didn't look like you wanted to be on the soccer pitch. I think we might have taken this game a little too lightly. I could see it, the way you were thinking. Ah, it's only Lethbridge, they haven't even scored against us this year, why should we worry? Well I guess we got our answer today. I don't think I have to tell you that I'm disappointed in our effort. As I look around this room I'm sure each and every one of you is thinking the same thing. We're lucky we got away with one point tonight. That was by far the worst effort of the year. It looked like we mailed this one in before we played it. Lethbridge shouldn't even be close to us. They haven't won a game in three years!! Three years. Well they were the better team tonight. In fact they should have destroyed us. We got lucky. Team play was non-existent and I didn't see one girl in here give it a real good effort. You played okay in the first half, but once you got ahead you let off. The only reason we walked out of here with a tie is because they didn't have the skill to hit the net even when it was empty. We better see a stronger effort tomorrow or we can kiss this season goodbye. If we want to make it to Western finals we'll need those two points tomorrow. I think we've all got a little soul searching to do. I expect to see everyone here two hours before the game tomorrow, we're going to have a little meeting. So get home and get a good nights sleep. I'll see everyone bright and early. I'm leaving you to think about this. If I was you I wouldn't leave this room until you figure some things out."

God is it quiet in here. Nobody's talking. It looks like everyone's going to stare a hole through the floor

"You know she's right. We played brutal. It was embarrassing sitting on the bench and watching. We looked so horrible. It was like nobody was talking or passing or anything. Everyone was playing on their own instead of like a team. It looked like we didn't trust each other. Someone would be open and the person with the ball would

ignore them and try and walk through the defense."

Licking the Wounds

"Ouch. She was pretty wound up."

"Yeah. I guess we deserved it. We sucked today." I think that was close to the worst game of my life. I can't ever remember feeling so humiliated, and on our home field. We missed our chances. Lethbridge played well. I can't believe we let them tie it up. Two minutes left, that's it. We should have beaten them. One lousy goal. I still can't believe the ref called that one back. I was nowhere close to being offside. How could he make a call like that? Smarten up, that was just one play. What about those chances I missed? I should've had that cross.

Numb. I feel numb. Water's almost scalding and I can't feel anything. Locker room is dead. No one's talking, nothing going on in here at all. I hate this. I can't remember ever feeling like this. This is definitely the worst moment of my playing career. Losing in front of the home crowd. This wouldn't be nearly as bad if it happened in Lethbridge, but at home. We let everyone down. I can't believe we let them do that to us. We should have destroyed them. Lethbridge is probably having a party. If they felt like this after every loss how can they keep playing? If we can't beat these guys how are we going to make it to nationals? Get out of here before I turn into a prune.

"Hey Libby. Are you going to watch the guys game?"

"You're kidding me right. No way. I need to get away from the field for a while. I can't stand watching after we've lost. It'll drive me crazy. I need to get my mind off things for a bit. I'm just gonna head out and hit the mall or something. Anything to get away from here and forget about this."

"I know. I think I'll just rent a movie or something tonight, maybe hang out with Greg a bit. If you want to come over later give me a call."

"All right. See you later."

"Hey Sara. Tough game."

"Hi Greg. What'd you think?"

"Truth. You won't get mad?"

"Ya, of course. Truth."

"Okay. But remember you promised not to get mad. Here goes . . . The team stunk. I mean it was downright ugly today. I don't know what happened but you definitely weren't there to play. Your whole team looked like a bunch of walking zombies. I know you think coach was being hard on you, but I think she took it easy. I mean it was painful to watch. And the end. I don't even know what to say. Lethbridge was the better team today. They should've won, and easily. I know you're mad at that one call, but it was pretty close, and it's not like you didn't have any other chances you know. More than just you though. The team looked brutal, even in the warmup."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know. It's just . . . I mean everything looked sloppy. It just seemed like nobody was ready. There was no intensity. Everyone was fooling around. Girls were laughing. Some of you came out late. It looked like no one was really trying to warm up. I don't know how to explain it. The team didn't look like it normally does before you play. You looked too relaxed or something."

"Funny. That's what coach said too. She said that was the worst warm up she'd ever seen. I know it was more relaxed, but we just weren't worried about losing. I didn't think we were that bad."

"Well, if I picked up on it, maybe you were."

Sweet Dreams

Move left, keeper's out, turn and face, now shoot. Whistle?!! Offside?!! No, no, what do you mean offside? Bad call, bad call, cost us game . . . Sweating . . . too hot in here, feels like I'm in a sauna. Tossing. Turning. Roll over, get rid of these covers. Forget it. I can't sleep. Minds going a thousand miles an hour. Play keeps going through my head over and over. Stupid call. I just can't get these images out of my mind. What a lousy game. Stuffy. So uncomfortable in here. When did my bed get so lumpy? I need a new mattress. I wonder what time it is? I should just get up. Make

some hot milk, maybe that'll help put me to sleep.

Second Chances

Come on car start. Fifteen minutes to get down to the field. I hope Greg understands. I just can't focus if he comes along. I need to be alone, think about what I need to do. I can't afford another game like yesterday. Get in the right frame of mind before I play. This is my ten minutes of peace and quiet before the game.

"I just wanted to say a few things. I know we had a tough game yesterday. We played poorly. Worse than that even, we played brutal. I'm not sure how to say this . . . I think we shouldn't be so hard on ourselves. We have a great team. I've never played on a team before where I felt so much like I belonged to part of the group. I think yesterday was just one of those things that happen sometimes. We should really just try to let it go. It's done with, over. I played on a squad last year where we never talked to each other. I never knew if the girl next to me hated me or loved me. We just didn't talk about things. We weren't really a team. I almost quit playing after that team. Then I came here. It took me a long time before I felt confident playing again but everyone here helped me feel comfortable. Everyone has been supportive. It feels like I'm part of a group, like a big family. I know I can trust all of you. I can count on you when I need you. I've never felt that before on any other team. I guess I'm saying all of this because I think we're okay. So we lost a game we should have won. If we get down on each other we're missing out on everything that makes us a special team. I just thought I should say that. I know we're going to bounce back today."

Wow. Did that really happen. I don't think Sherry has said more than two words in a row all year. Dead silent in here. She's right. Maybe I should say something.

"Hey Sherry. Thanks for telling it like it is. Yesterday was a bit of bad luck and lot of overconfidence. I thought that maybe today we could use a little help. I'm sure everyone knows already that I got these soccer candies from my secret buddy. Well I want to say thanks and I thought that each of us could use a little luck today, so before we go out I want everyone to grab one of these good luck candies."

That was a little more intense. Good talk about focusing on the game at hand rather than down the road.

"That was a great game today. I was so embarrassed after yesterday. I hardly slept last night I kept running the game through my head over and over. I guess it's good in a way to get a game like that, better to go through it now rather than during playoffs. Maybe we we're getting a little bit cocky."

"Yeah Sara, for sure. So what time are we supposed to meet everyone tonight?"

"I think at eight. I think it changed the restaurant. I think we're going to the Old Spaghetti Factory instead of Yianni's. I'll phone Cheryl and find out. Maybe I'll invite the girls over to my place afterwards. We can rent a movie or something."

"Sounds great. Do you suppose I could catch a ride from you tonight?"

"No problem Libby. I'll give you a call before I come pick you up."

"All right. See you later."

Something Old and Something New (All Athletes are Not Created Equally)

<u>What's Best for the Team</u>

"What do you mean I'm not playing?"

"Listen Danny. We just think you'd be hurting yourself if we put you in. You've done a good job for us all year, we don't want to see you get hurt. Besides, I don't think you're capable of doing the job at this point. Frankly, you haven't been playing with the same level of commitment as we've come to expect from you."

"What?!! You know I've been playing injured. I can barely walk after a game and I'm not committed? I'm killing myself out there for the team."

"We just think this is the best thing to do."

"This is my last kick at the cat. I've had four great years with this team and now you're telling me I can't play at Nationals. I destroyed in Canada West. I can't believe you're doing this. I've worked my butt off for this team for four years."

"I'm sorry. That's the way it is. This is the best thing for you and for the team. We can't afford to have you out there at less than a hundred percent. We're just trying to

do what's best for everyone. The decision is final."

Best for everyone or best for you? What the hell just happened in there? Day before the biggest game of my University career and he's telling me I can't play. That was a load of bull! What a power trip that guy's on. I can't believe they're not gonna let me play. After everything I've done for this team over the years. I practically killed myself to play this year. It's gonna take the rest of the school year to heal. I'm the most committed guy on this team. First to every practice, last off the field. I can't believe this is happening. I deserve a chance to play, even if I'm not a hundred percent. He let me play in Western Finals. Now he's worried I won't be able to finish the round robin, just because we're playing for the National Championship now I'm too hurt. Unbelievable.

All This Time

Bored. All this time, what am I going to do? I've got those readings for psych class tomorrow. Nahh, I can do those tonight, I don't really feel like reading. Maybe someone will come and workout with me. Hmm, nobody in the team room. I wonder if anyone's hanging out at SUB? It's funny. I didn't have enough time to keep up during the season, now I have all the time in the world and I can't even motivate myself to do a little bit of reading. Three weeks ago I couldn't wait for the season to be over because I was so busy and now I'm missing it.

Jeez. No one around in here either. I'm bored stiff, maybe I'll get something to eat and head back to the team room.

"Sara! How are you?"

"Oh, Candace. Hey I didn't see you there. I was just looking for some of the soccer girls. How are things?"

"Good, well pretty good. It's getting busy right now. I have a lot of papers and assignments to get done. Training is the same old thing. I was sorry to hear about Nationals. I read about it last week."

"Yeah, me too. You're the first person to really say that. Everyone else has been congratulating me on how we did. I'm not sure what to say to them. Bronze was pretty

good I guess, I was disappointed though. I thought we could win it all. We fell apart when it counted. It's a real let down coming back to school after Nationals. It'd be different if we had done as well as expected, but I just can't seem to concentrate on school yet."

"Yeah it's tough. I went through a bit of that last year too, but not until summer. Volleyball ends so late there's no time to think about things. I had to really get focused on school and get ready for exams. Then I drove myself crazy about it for the first part of the summer, I got pretty bummed out and missed it a lot, but I tried to use it to motivate me for this year."

"So is it working?"

"Well so far, but like I said, the training is starting to get to me. I never get tired of playing, but I could use a break from practice to get caught up. You must be glad huh? Two tough months and then you're done. I wish volleyball was more like that."

"Yeah, it's nice to be done. I don't miss the training either but it's a real intense couple of months. You get so far behind. It's tough getting back into school after the season finishes."

"At least you're done. I've still got four months of this left. You've got the rest of the year off to yourself."

"Not really. We get a couple of weeks off and then we start training again. We're supposed to be working out three times a week until the end of the term and then team practices will start in January. We'll train once a week as a team and then run everyday on our own. It gets tough staying motivated when nothing is going on. It's funny. It's been nice taking it easy, but I'm starting to get antsy again. I've got all this time and nothing to do. You kind of get used to having everything built around a schedule and now that I can do whatever I want I get even less done. I kind of miss the structure, not necessarily the time or training , but the structure."

"Yeah well not me. I'd love to do something besides showing up to the gym. I've got so much school work to do it's not funny. How's everyone else doing?"

"Good I guess. We haven't been hanging out since things wrapped up. Everyone usually takes off on their own for a while after season finishes. We all need a bit of a break. I've been mostly hanging out with friends and stuff. I've been spending more time with Greg."

"I don't think I've seen anyone outside of volleyball all year. I'm starting to lose my friends. I'm pretty sure they get a little ticked off at me. I never go out with them. I always say maybe and then end up doing something for volleyball or school. I just hope they understand."

"Yeah, the good ones will. I'm gonna get going here. Good luck for the rest of the term. I'm sure I'll see you around."

"See ya Sara."

Exams

"Like I said before. Practice this week is optional. I know you've got a lot of other things to focus on right now. However, I do want to stress that I'd like to see you try to come to at least two practices during each of the two weeks. We have a sign up sheet for the rest of the week. Put down the days that you'll be able to come in. If you're having major problems I want you to come in and talk to me, otherwise good luck and we'll see you next week."

It would've been nice to hear that last week when I had three papers due. I still haven't had time to start studying for finals. At least we didn't have to play last week. I just wish I didn't have to study. I'd give anything to go skiing for a weekend. Roomies are going to Jasper after classes finish. Fresh snow, get away from here for a while. I can't wait for vacation.

"You got a lot of exams Clayton?"

"Yeah, five. What about you?"

"Three left. I wrote one this morning. Are you gonna be working at home?"

"Nah. I can't get anything done there. I'll probably end up cramming at the twenty four hour study hall in SUB."

"Same here. I think there's going to be a bunch of us over there. Most of the girls are studying there too."

"Oh that should be fun. I thought the idea was to study? With all of us there we'll never get anything done. Anyway I'm outta here. I'll see you later Ross."

"All right. What about tomorrow night?"

"What do you mean?"

"Last day of classes. We've gotta go out. What's everyone think about hitting the clubs?"

"Yeah, but I'm not sure where."

"MALIBU you morons. The word is Malibu. All the other teams are going there."

"Excuse me Trent for being focused on other things. Malibu it is. All right Ross. Why don't I come pick you up around 10:00? We'll meet you other clowns in there about 10:30."

"Hold on guys. I'm having a little party at my place before we go. Come over anytime after six. I think we'll be going all night."

"Okay Trent. I'll see all you apes later."

"Sounds good."

<u>To Go or Not to Go</u>

"Forget it. There's no way I'm going to practice Clayton. I know I signed up for this one but I didn't get anything done last night."

"Okay Ross. Coach is gonna kill you man. You better go in and talk to him at least. You know how he is about things like this."

"I know. I'm just afraid I'll feel so guilty if I talk to him. I really need to get more studying done. I still have four chapters to read and I haven't even looked at my class notes yet."

"Well I'm going. It's nice to have the break after reading all day. Lets me blow off some steam. I'll see you later. Make sure you tell him or he'll be really ticked. I

think he'll understand if you tell him why, just let him know."

"I know you're right. I'm just worried that he's going to give me that speech about, 'you can't play if you can't stay in school, everyone is relying on you to do well'. I just don't think I could handle the guilt trip."

"It's up to you. I think you should give him a shot, you'll be surprised. I won't say anything if he asks, all right? I'm taking off before I'm late."

"Ahhh, hold on. Now you're guilting me into talking to him. Give me a second I'm coming with you."

Holidays! What holidays?!

"Okay boys, that's it. The last practice before Christmas vacation. I hope that everyone has a good holiday and congratulations on finishing all of your exams. I just want to remind you that we will be starting practices again on the 30th. I expect everyone to be here and on time. If anyone is going to have a problem with this you need to talk to me today. Also, I know this is vacation but let's not get too crazy. We've prepared a summary of things to avoid and we hope that you'll find the time to get in some workouts while you're gone. We will be having an open gym time Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for anyone that's in the city. And I hope I don't need to remind you about taking it easy with the recreational activities. Especially partying. Remember, you guys have been training hard all year to get in this condition, I don't want you blowing it all in one week. I better not see anyone coming back ten pounds heavier from Christmas turkey and I especially don't want to see any injuries. Clayton, that means no snowboarding like last year."

"Are we allowed to open our own gifts on Christmas or do we have to watch out for potential hand injuries?"

"Okay guys. I know this is tough, but let's keep in mind that the season starts up again the first week of January. All right gentleman, have a good holiday. We'll see you on the 30th."

There's license to have some fun. Yeehaa. One whole week off and only a

thousand restrictions. I'd give anything to go skiing for a weekend. What am I thinking? I can't do that. What if I hurt myself? Coach'd never forgive me, I'd never forgive me. We're having a great season, I can't do anything to jeopardize it. Still I wish I could have a little break. Maybe I can do something a little less dangerous. I could go sledding or skidooing.

I wish we had more time. One week is not gonna do it for me. I need at least two weeks to heal up. I've got bruises everywhere. "Practice on the 30th. What's that all about? We didn't do that last year."

"Look what happened last year Clayton. I sprained my leg, everyone else got so wrecked over holidays it took us nearly three weeks to get back into shape. I think he's trying to keep us out of trouble by having us come back before New Year's."

"Well it bites. I was looking forward to vacation."

"No kidding. See you on the 30th."

"Have a good holiday Ross."

"You too Clay."

A Training Resolution

Come on feet move. Get to the ball, get to the ball. Off the hand. I should've had that one. Way too slow. Just about got nailed in the head with that one. Man does coach seem like he's in a foul mood. Why is he killing us like this? Sprint after sprint. Jumping. Puke drills. I can't move my legs anymore. Feels like lead weights on my shoes.

TWEEET!

"All right men it's time for our line drills. You know how they go so let's get to it."

Oh God! He's trying to kill us. I'm gonna die. When's this going to be over?

TWEEET!!!

"Okay boys that's it. Sparkes, you have the cool down."

Thank God. I was so close to losing it. Can't breath. Head hurts from running.

Definitely back into the swing of things. Everything hurts. I mean everything. I can barely touch my toes. Legs are dead. Shoulders are sore. So much for getting healed over holidays. I was just starting to feel better, now I've bruised every bone in my body on those digging drills. I'm gonna be black and blue everywhere.

". . . Hit the showers and take it easy tonight. Next practice is tomorrow, one in the afternoon. I'll see you there, and be ready to practice hard."

"I think he was running us so we wouldn't get too crazy tonight. Sweet huh!?"

"It worked. I'm going home and sleeping for two days, forget about New Year's. Maybe he'll be nice and let us have Reading Week off?"

"Don't count on it. Just remember, this'll all be worth it if we can make it to Nationals."

"Yeah. And if we don't? . . ."

New Beginnings

A new semester. Looking forward to seeing everyone again tonight. What's it been? A month now. I wonder what we'll be doing tonight? Hopefully some game drills. I hope we don't do much running. Funny bumping into Candace. Volleyball and Basketball sure get the short end of the stick. I guess we're pretty lucky to get Christmas off. I can't imagine what it's like to train over the holidays.

God. That was one boring practice. Amazing how bad a shape you can get into over a few weeks. Talking about fund raising already. Looks like we're still working bingos even second term. I guess it helps to pay for next season. I still think we're getting ripped off. I don't see any football guys working at a bingo. Somebody was telling me they get as much money from athletics for their tape budget as all other teams combined. Outrageous.

"Sara, do you want to go running Thursday?"

"Nah. I've got some other things to do. Greg and I are going shopping after school on Thursday. Maybe next week. We can talk about it at the next practice. I'll see you on Wednesday Libby."

Training, Training, Training

"I just don't know how to stay motivated. I can't seem to train unless I'm doing it with somebody."

"Yeah. It's hard, but after a while it just becomes routine. I kind of like doing it now. It's fun going into the gym and seeing everyone. I don't know if I really like lifting weights but it's about the only chance I get to see all my friends from the other teams. It's like everyone catches up with each other in there. I also try to think of it as an extended training camp for National team tryouts in late spring. It's tough to get motivated, but you gotta do it. It's nice too, there's not the same pressure to be in shape as there is during the year. If I have too many things on the go I can just miss a day of training or I can work out at a different time."

"That doesn't work for me. I need that pressure to get things done otherwise I won't do it. During the season I always knew what I had to do next. Now I seem to have too much time on my hands. I have trouble staying focused."

The Blues

Volleyball is starting to drag. Six month season. I could sure use the break about now. Big exams coming up and I'm not ready at all. Still one month of training left and we don't even get a break over Reading Week. We should get a bigger scholarship or something. Training everyday for six months. I'm going to blow a fuse soon. I just want to do something different. This routine is getting boring in a big way. I don't care if I see another volleyball for the rest of my life. I can't remember the last time I had a day to myself just to sit back and relax without having to think about volleyball or school. I think I'll head over to SUB, see if anyone's kicking around.

Playoffs

The Build Up

These two a days are starting to catch up with me. Feel like I haven't slept in a week. I just want to get there and get going. I'm so glad we're playing at home. At least I have a little bit of extra time to get some things done. I'm totally geared about this but

I'll be glad when it's over. I need a break. This is one long season. It'll be nice to sit back and relax a bit instead of constantly running around. One more week, then it's over. Maybe then I can get caught up in school. I need to start studying for finals. I've still got to finish those two papers off. There's no way I'm getting anything done until this week is over. Maybe I'll sleep for a week when we're done. My body could sure use the rest. I'm close to the breaking point. My shoulder is turning to putty. Bruises everywhere from hitting the floor. I just wish my thumb wasn't so sore. Everytime I touch the ball I get a jolt of pain through my hand. I can't close the block properly in practice. I don't want to jam it again before the tournament. Oh well, tough it out. In a week I can rest it all I want.

Playing for Gold

The Home Crowd

"Hey Darlene. You've gotta see it out there. The place is packed, like to the roof. People are standing in the hallway. The T.V. cameras are everywhere. It's completely nuts out there."

"I can't look Candace. I'm too nervous. I've gotta focus or I'm gonna lose it."

"Hey don't worry about it. We're all a little nervous, but it's good you know? It means we're getting pumped. You'll be okay out there. You've kicked ass all year, this is no different." I'm so pumped. I'm gonna jump right out of the gym tonight. I'm gonna break something if we don't get out there soon. Way too much energy. I'm shaking like crazy. Ten more minutes. Seems like forever. Here comes coach. I can't wait to get out there.

Wow. The big game. I can't believe we're here. I mean, I knew we were going to make it, I just can't believe it's here already. Everybody's so quiet. I wonder what everyone's thinking? I still can't believe this is happening. They're all here to watch us. Wow. I wish we could get playing. Let's get started. I just want to play.

"This is it ladies. I just want to say a few things before we get out there. I want to keep this short because, well, there's really not much to say that hasn't been said before.

Tonight is a very special night. This is what we've been working for all year long. I want you to know that regardless of how this final game turns out that I'm very proud of you. We've had an incredible year. There's a lot of great memories. Together we've overcome a lot of obstacles. Now we're at the big game. I know there's a lot of pressure on us to win. We're in front of our home crowd. We're ranked number one. None of that matters. I hope that we can go out and play like we have all year long, as a team. Let's enjoy these moments. Let's go out and have some fun."

Everything on the Line

This is it. Everything we've been working for all year. God I hope I don't make a fool of myself in front of everyone. I just need to warm up, get focused. Try and get past all the excitement. Tonight is just like any other game. Who am I kidding? This is the biggest game of my life. Please don't make an idiot of myself. Here we go.

"GO PANDAS GO. GO PANDAS GO. GO PANDAS GO . . ."

Oh my God!! Look at the crowd. I've never seen so many people in here before. They're going crazy. Big butterflies. This is unbelievable. Everyone's going crazy. All these people here to watch us. I can't believe it. Look around. Wow. I can't hear anything.

"Darlene!"

"What?!"

"Darlene!! Look over there. It's everyone. I mean everyone from the sports teams are over there. They're going nuts. They all painted themselves. This is totally cool." Wow I better try and get focused. I can feel the energy rising. Start warming up. Gotta get into the right frame of mind. What do I need to focus on tonight?

They look good. She's really pounding the ball tonight. I've got to stop her. Focus on blocking her and the rest of the team folds. "We stop number twelve and they're gonna fold, we gotta get on her right from the start."

"Yeah. We'll get her. Let's not forget about what we can do either huh, get them on the defensive quick and then we can play our game."

"You got it. This is amazing huh. I still can't get over how many people are here. This is great!"

"Yeah. It's freaking me out a bit. I don't want to make any mistakes tonight, you know? The home town crowd. I just hope we play as well as we can."

"We will. We've done it all year. Nothing changes tonight, there's just more people watching us right? Once we get started we'll be fine, you'll forget all about the crowd."

"Yeah you're right. I just wish we'd get started. All this hoopla is making me nervous. We still have the anthem and opening ceremonies to get through. I'm gonna be a bundle of nerves before we ever get going."

Okay here we go. I thought we'd never start. Centred, controlled, focused. Serving for the deep right corner. Make good contact. Keep the ball in. You can blow the whistle anytime Mr. Referee. Deep breath. All right here it comes. The first serve.

So Close and Yet so Far

"Okay ladies I called this time out to give you a breather and to get you refocused. I know we're really close, but we haven't finished this thing yet. We've still got to score three more points and they can still come back so let's take it a point at a time. Forget about everything else going on. Let's focus on the next point and go from there, okay? Let's get back out there and finish this."

Oh God we're close! We're gonna win, we're gonna win. Wait . . . calm down. Stay focused, there's still two points left. Stay focused on the play. That's it follow the ball, quick cover, cover. Yeahh! Point. Okay. Serving for the match. I can't believe this is happening. We're actually going to do it. Listen to the crowd, they're going nuts. There's the serve. Get focused. Come on . . . move, stay in the play.

"WE DID IT!!"

"CANDACE!!"

"DARLENE. WE DID IT!!"

" I don't believe it. I'm shaking."

"Yahoo! We did it. We're the champs!!"

Who are all these people running around out here? Where's the rest of the team? My God it's absolutely crazy in here. We've gotta get everyone. There's Sharon, and coach.

"This is awesome!!"

"I'm loving it. Look at everyone in here going crazy."

"Okay. If we can get everyone to clear the floor we'd like to begin the medal presentations. Thank you for cooperating."

"CANDACE. Pretty cool huh! We're gonna need security to get everyone out of here. We are gonna have a party tonight."

"You better believe it."

Celebration (Recognition)

"Hey congratulations. Way to play."

"Yeah congrats. You kicked some serious butt. PANDAS RULE."

God are there ever a bunch of weirdos in here. Drunks running around everywhere. You'd think they were the ones that played. Still it's pretty cool seeing everyone out for this. I didn't think they were going to let us in here for a bit. The place is packed with everyone. There's the guys over there. I should go say hi to Clay.

"Hey Clayton."

"Candace. Congratulations. That was an awesome game you played. You deserved to win. You ladies kicked some serious behind."

"Thanks for coming out. We appreciate it."

"We're not the only team here. All the teams are here, even football. This is the event of the year you know. It's a good thing you won or this would've been a real downer."

"Thanks Clay. I was sorry to hear about you guys."

"No worries. We sucked. There's always next year. Anyway this a celebration party. Hey check it out. They've been playing your game on tape here. They showed it

on TSN. It's pretty wild."

"Oh God. Those uniforms look brutal. I'm gonna have to talk to coach and get them changed for next year. Is it ever weird seeing that on tape. I still can't believe so many people showed up."

"Yeah it was nuts. Standing room only. It was cool to watch. Let me buy you a drink and then let's mingle. I want to talk with some of the other girls, maybe I can bask in your glory for a little while."

"You've got a deal."

Stars on Campus

"Congratulations. Great game on the weekend. You played awesome!"

"Uh. Thanks." Who was that guy? I don't think I know him. Wow, pretty weird. I guess people really noticed us. All these people I've never seen before giving me congratulations. Pretty cool. I don't know if I can take this. It's getting embarrassing. Where were they all before we won the championship? It seems like everybody's talking about us. I can't believe we're actually making an impact on people. It's kind of neat. I wonder how long it'll last. How many of these people actually watched the games? Or did they just see me on the boob tube?

"Way to go!!"

"Way to kick some butt. Panda's rule!"

"Uh, thanks." I hope I run into somebody I know soon. I can't handle much more of this. I'm about ready to burst. I feel like everybody knows me, like they all watched me play. I can't believe the season's over. It happened so fast.

"Good afternoon class. I would like to start off by congratulating Ms. Candace Simpson on a successful weekend. I'm sure that most of you know, but in case any of you have been hibernating for the past three days the Panda's volleyball team; of which Ms. Simpson is a key member, defeated the University of British Columbia in the C.I.A.U. final tournament to win the national championship. If this was not enough Ms. Simpson was named the tournament MVP. I would also like to point out that Ms.

Simpson has been an Academic All-Canadian each of her last three years, including this year. Perhaps we could all learn something from Ms. Simpson's commitment and effort. Well done Ms. Simpson, well done. Now, with the formalities out of the way, you may recall that we finished last class discussing the biomechanical advantages of the . . . "

Oh my god. Tell me that didn't just happen. Please tell me. Oh, what an embarrassment. Did he have to do that in front of the entire class? I'm never going to live this down. People are going to hate me for this.

Life After the Season

The Awards Banquet

"Hey Danny boy. You're looking pretty dapper tonight."

"Yeah, well I thought I'd try and make at least one decent appearance over the course of my career. I'm trying to go out in style."

"Well you are looking sharp."

"Thanks Pete, but it's not doing you any good, you know I won't be back next year. You better try buttering up some of the other vets."

"No way man. You helped get me through the year. We'll be missing you. There's not too many of those other vets I trust. I'm just sorry it had to finish the way it did. We didn't agree with coach. All the guys on the team wanted you to play at Nationals."

"You and me both. I'm still pretty bitter about the whole thing. I don't think I'll ever talk to coach again. Anyway, I'll talk to you later. I've got to go see some folks." Okay let's see if I can find Clay. Ahh, there he is.

"Hey big guy!"

"Danny boy. Good to see you. I was hoping I'd run into you here. How have things been?"

"Good. I've been keeping busy all summer. I've been working with some sport camps. It's been fun. What about you?"

"Lot's of changes. I finished my last course in the spring and since then I moved

down to Calgary. I've got a teaching job at one of the high schools down there."

"Sounds great. Have you been playing any ball?"

"No way. My body was all out of whack. I'm just barely feeling normal again. I might start playing again in January. I had a couple of teams ask me in September but I still need the break. Besides, I'm trying to get settled into teaching. It's been a big adjustment. Hey I need to get a few things figured out. I've been writing things down on napkins."

"Oh yeah. The big speech tonight. Well good luck Clay. I'll track you down afterwards."

"Sounds good Danny. I'll talk to you later."

I hope he does okay. It'll be interesting to hear what he has to say.

The Speech

"I miss it you know. Not the pain or the working out or anything like that. I just miss the whole environment. It's the weirdest things. Like the smell of the gym. I can close my eyes and remember the smell like it was yesterday. It's kind of stale, maybe even pungent, like old wood and sweat mixed together. I can remember the smoothness of the floor under my feet. The floor used to give just a little bit, it almost bounced. I mean every gym had a certain feel to it. You recognized it instantly, the second you entered the room. What's the word . . . ambience. They had a certain ambience to them. They're all different. Some of them you liked, others you hated. You know, like our gym, I didn't really like the way it looked. It was old and dingy. It had a bad setup. It's not nearly as nice as the court they have in Calgary, the one built for the National teams to train on, that's a great court. A beautiful facility, but I hated it. Too big, too artificial. Our gym had something though. Our gym had a really good vibe, it was like a second home for me. It always felt right to me. From the very first day I stepped in there. It's comfortable, safe. I was used to the way it looked, everything about the court, the floor, the walls, everything.

I can remember playing in Montreal for our first final. I hated it. Everything

about the place felt wrong to me. I loved Montreal, I just hated playing in their gym. It felt like we were in this hostile place. Everyone was against us. It was so hard staying focused out there. That's one of the things I liked about playing at home. It was so much easier to focus. I always felt good at home. The pressure was different. I felt like I had to perform better at home, I didn't want to let anyone down. But I also felt like it was easier, the fans were helping me to play better or something. They could lift me up. When we were in Montreal all we could think about was how hostile it was. We almost felt lonely. When we lost the final that year it was hard to take. We were bitter. We were alone. There's no place so cold as losing on the road. Everyone in the place is cheering for the team that beat you. They're celebrating, and you have to sit there and watch the whole thing happen. You really feel like you've let everyone down. That people at home won't understand why you couldn't get it done for them.

One of the things I don't miss is being tired all the time. It always seemed like I was trying to recover from something, whether it was a bad bruise, stiffness, or maybe even an injury. Everyday while you're playing there's something that bothers you physically. For most people I think it's just that feeling of being tired and sore from training so hard all the time. I didn't feel fully recovered until about six months had gone by without playing. Six months! Your body gets really worn down from training all the time. Everyone thinks you're in such great shape, and in a lot of ways you are, but you're a wreck in other ways. Training hard every day takes it's toll. It was funny too because you felt different at certain times of the year.

I can remember at the beginning of the season I was always in great shape. I'd lifted weights and ran all summer, I was fit, I felt great. Once you'd start training for the season though you'd realize you weren't in game shape. I just wasn't able to last for a whole session without wanting to die. It's like you're just a little bit slower than you need to be. As the season moves on you get in better game shape. It's easier to play, you get more stamina. There's this small window of time where everything clicks perfectly. You're physically sound and the timing is back. It's easy to play at that point. It doesn't

seem to last very long though. Pretty soon the body starts getting worn down. You might pull something or get a bad bruise. The timing is still there, you're in great game shape, but you're hurting. By the end of the year a lot of times you were a wreck. You'd lost weight, you were sore a lot of the time. I was always tired near the end of the season. It's really weird because that's when everything gets going. The playoffs are coming up, in school you're close to exams. On the one hand you're excited about the playoffs and on the other you're getting tired, you're behind in school, and you're body's taking a beating. There's all these things pulling at you. In some ways you can't wait for it to be over. And then it ends. The season finishes and you're left with just the memories of what happened. The first couple of weeks after the season were always great. It was like time had finally slowed down and you could catch your breath. I could hang out with my friends again, I would get caught up in school. Well, almost. I was doing things that I didn't have time for during the season. After that couple of weeks I started missing the whole thing. I wanted to train. I wanted to be with the rest of the team. Something that had been such a huge part of my life was actually done. It's a big adjustment. You've spent everyday for the past six months with the same people working toward the same thing. You get really close to them. It's funny, you've got all this time on your hands and now you don't know what to do with it. Soon you move on. It's not just the end of the season any more, now it's the end of your career. Other opportunities knock. Priorities change.

There are some things you can never get used to missing. Mostly that feeling of excitement I used to get before I stepped into the gym. It's kind of like a different world. I used to go in there and forget about everything else. It was a haven for me. I've thought about it a lot since I've stopped playing. I miss the freedom of being on the court. Making plays, getting absorbed in the action. I can still feel moments when I was playing. I'm not really sure how to explain it any better than that. Playing gave me a sense of freedom and control. I could influence what was happening. Those were sheer moments of joy for me. I think for all of us the moment of playing is what brings us to

sport. We enjoy pushing our limits, testing our abilities against a challenge. These ideas are difficult to put in words. I can only hope that each of you knows what I'm talking about, because we all experience it when we play.

I'd like to thank you for listening to the reflections of a former student athlete. My involvement in university sport holds some of the best times of my life. Even through all the struggles, the work, the injuries, I had to smile. I made some great friends and had some incredible experiences on and off the field. For some of you this is the beginning, for others perhaps this is already your last year. I hope all of you can look back fondly, cherish your memories and consider how fortunate you are. Savour these moments and always remember, you are part of a legacy. Thank you and good luck."

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In my attempt to explore the lifeworld of the university athlete I have processed many experiences. As I approach the end of this journey it seems prudent to reflect on what has taken place, what I have learned, the significance of the study and my future directions.

Reflections

For any child exploring the world, learning comes through action and reflection. Sometimes the child is successful, other times mistakes are made in the process of learning. The baby learns to crawl, soon tentative steps are taken and eventually the child is walking. Along the way many stumbles and falls contribute to the learning. I am taking my first tentative steps in the world of research. Part of this learning process is to reflect on some of my stumbles.

One of the difficulties and benefits of this study resulted from the use of emergent design. As I conducted interviews and analyzed the data, it became evident that quality of life issues were secondary to the lifeworld description of the university athlete. It became less important to pursue reflections on quality of life. I felt that including direct discussion of quality of life in the findings would have changed the effectiveness of the lifeworld description. I decided that quality of life could best be handled by allowing the reader to draw conclusions based on the text. I also felt I could discuss my reflections of quality of life in the discussion section. Allowing the study to evolve without pursuing my original intentions was difficult, especially during the writing stages. I felt a certain sense of duty, as if I had to pursue quality of life issues. These feelings arose due to the importance the quality of life concept had contributed to my interest and positioning to this topic. Directly assessing quality of life no longer seemed reasonable but the concept was still critical to the foundation and direction of the study.

I also experienced minor difficulties in the data collection process. A great deal

of time elapsed between the initial interview and subsequent interviews and a reading of the text by participants. This was partly due to my shortcomings as a researcher and partly due to the demanding schedule of those I interviewed. Two of the participants were involved in National Team tryouts and the other two were heavily involved with work and school at the time of the interviews. In the future I think it would be beneficial to keep interview sessions closer together during the data gathering process.

Furthermore, I interviewed a group of athletes that were very successful in both the athletic and academic domains. This might have narrowed my understanding of the lifeworld of the university athlete. Each athlete interviewed had either played or tried out for National teams in their respective sport. Perhaps these athletes had very different experiences from other less successful athletes. This high level of competence may have influenced my view of the lifeworld of the university athlete.

One very interesting difficulty within the text came with describing moments of actual play. The participants had problems describing the play experience and these descriptions were very limited. Parts of this were certainly due to my skills as an interviewer, but I think it was more the result of the limitations of expressing moments of play. Athletes are often out of language when they are in the flow of playing and expressing thoughts can only occur through reflection. The moment of play seems to lack language. It is very much a direct experience that, at least in my opinion, does not translate well into language.

On a more technical note, conducting, transcribing, and analyzing interviews was a long, difficult process. Transcribing is perhaps my weakest skill as a researcher. I am a slow typist without having to listen to a tape and transcribe the conversation. This was a very frustrating component of my thesis. In the future I would hire someone to transcribe the interviews for me. I found that I could not follow the content of the interviews while transcribing due to my lack of competence in typing. Reading the transcripts and listening to the tapes without typing were the most effective means of reviewing the interviews. I also found that I was able to keep good notes from all the interviews and

reviewing these notes immediately after the interviews helped me to remember the pertinent details of the interview.

Thoughts on Quality of Life

The original purpose of this study was to examine the physical activity experiences of university athletes and see how these experiences were related to quality of life by the athlete. However, consistent with the emergent design process, what is intended does not always transpire. Due to the developing nature of the research, I chose to examine quality of life separately from the description of physical activity experiences.

Quality of life is a highly important concept in today's rapidly changing world. People are concerned with creating high quality life experiences. One of the reasons I chose to examine quality of life indirectly is the highly individual notion of the concept. I hope that through the examination of the text, the reader will realize the complexity of our lived experience and notions like quality of life. I further hope that reading the text will help enlighten individuals to their own concepts of quality of life. A quick examination of the text shows the multidimensionality of the life experience of the university athlete. I think this complexity is not limited to the university athlete, it is present in all aspects of our experience. I hope this research can help with conceptions of our own lives.

The question remains, what is quality of life? As discussed, it is very much an individual formulation, however, I think there are certain commonalities among conceptions. I think quality of life is a reflection of the quality of our everyday experiences. Quality of life is a conceptual notion; it is not a direct experience, rather it is based on the interpretation of other experiences. Quality of life is an impression of, or the summation of, the quality of a series of experiences. The more high quality experiences we have, the more likely it is that we have the impression of living a high quality life. The more low or poor quality experiences we have, the more likely we will have an impression of having a low quality of life. For example, the participants of the study all discussed the difficulties of managing time, practice schedules, games and school work.

They seemed to experience almost daily low quality experiences related to the stress and pressures of dealing with heavy commitments. However, these experiences were outweighed by the daily positive experiences of friendship, accomplishment, and especially play. The high quality experiences seemed to outweigh the few low quality experiences. One particular character, Danny, had a rough year as a player. He was plagued by injuries and the season ended on a bad note. I would suggest that his low quality experiences outweighed the high quality experiences. He would say that he had a low quality of life over the course of his last season. My current thoughts on quality of life also reflect the importance of the concepts of flow, meaning, balance and freedom. I will try to explain these concepts and the beginnings of my thoughts on how I see them connected to quality of life.

Sport is a connector. Sport allows us to live in the moment, to be connected with the immediacy of the world. Isn't it interesting that an event removed from the "real world" can bring us so immediately into the realm of concrete experience? Sport, through the suspension of everyday existence, allows us to experience the lifeworld directly. It is in this way that sport can enhance quality of life. Involvement in sport allows us to be fully engaged in the moment. Being fully engaged in the current moment can enhance quality of life. Engagement allows us to find enjoyment and meaning in our existence. Activities that engage our concentration, energy and abilities may help us to be more fully human.

Sport engages our full senses and abilities, particularly during moments of play. That is, those moments of experiencing joy, freedom, and competence in the height of game competition or game-like situations. It removes us from the routine normalcy and problems of everyday life and yet, brings us completely into the moment. All of our concentration, energy, and ability become focused. This, perhaps, is one of the reasons why playing the game is so enjoyable. It can remove us from the "real world" while placing us fully in it. For example, all the participants described being very focused during game situations. These moments required complete concentration on the task at

hand in order to perform and respond to the demands of the environment. During these moments of game play, everyday rules of existence were suspended. The athletes were immersed in a context removed from everyday experience where they could become fully engaged in the physical self. This engagement allowed them to forget about concerns of the everyday world while helping them to be fully focused on immediate senses and experiences. A more specific illustration from the text occurred when the volleyball team was playing for the National Championship at home. Candace was overwhelmed by the size of the crowd, the pressure of playing, and the hype associated with the event, but she knew that once the game started she would be all right. During the course of the game she was able to focus completely on the experience of playing and was able to lose sight of the surrounding distractions in the environment. These illustrations of play and engagement highlight the importance sport can have in the experience of engagement and quality of life.

How is engagement related to quality of life? Flow is a direct result of engagement. Flow, simply put, is a balance between abilities and challenges (Csikzentmihalyi, 1991). If we have high abilities and engage ourselves in low challenges we will experience boredom (Csikzentmihalyi, 1991). Equally interesting is the experience of anxiety resulting from engagement in high challenges when you have low abilities (Csikzentmihalyi, 1991). However, when we are faced with high challenges and we have the capabilities to deal with the challenge we are forced to become fully immersed in the current moment. We must be fully attentive and focused in order to meet the challenge. It is this full engagement that leads to enjoyment and the experience of flow. It is only through full engagement that we can experience flow states. Quality of life and flow are intimately linked. If we experience flow are we experiencing a high quality of life? Perhaps, but it is not so much the experience of flow like states that are important, rather it is the full engagement of our abilities to meet a challenge that is important. In other words, it is complete engagement in the moment that can lead to flow. In this sense flow may be thought of as contributing to a high quality experience

and in turn, a high quality of life.

As I mentioned earlier, quality of life is not a singular experience. It is an impression of multiple experiences. The more high quality experiences we have the more likely we will have the impression of experiencing a high quality of life. High quality experiences are not only the result of being enjoyable (flow) but also stem from the pursuit of meaningful activities. For example, I could be fully engaged in a game of chess. I may enjoy chess. I can be matched against an equal or slightly better opponent. I may need to be fully engaged in order to utilize my abilities to match the demands. I can experience flow, but what is the meaning of the experience for me? Is chess an important pursuit? Does it enhance the quality of my life? Yes, it can enhance the quality of my life but in varying degrees based on the meaning of the experience.

If chess is simply an entertainment, a distraction, then the experience may have little meaning. I can experience flow, but my involvement may not be driven toward a higher purpose. If the pursuit of excellence in chess is my dream, then it can significantly improve the quality of my life. Flow states achieved through the pursuit of dreams can positively contribute to other aspects of my life that a flow experience of lesser meaning cannot provide. The pursuit of excellence, the dream, will help me find meaning in other, perhaps mundane experiences because I see them as being important in the pursuit of my dream. In both cases, whether I see chess as entertainment or I see it as the pursuit of my dream, the experience of flow can improve the quality of my life. However, the experience of flow in the pursuit of a dream can have greater impact on quality of life than a less meaningful flow experience.

The pursuit of a dream can add meaning to experiences. If I want to become a member of the Canadian Olympic Volleyball Team factors such as health, fitness, education, training, friends and family may become meaningful in the pursuit of my dream. In order to pursue my dream these other factors must be managed, if they are ignored they can become a barrier in my dream pursuit. Keeping these other areas in balance can add to my quality of life. If volleyball is simply an enjoyable activity it is

less likely that meaning in other experiences will be derived from my playing. Enjoying volleyball, does not engage me to find meaning or significance in other experiences, to organize my life, relationships, work and other factors in a way that pursuing volleyball as a dream would. What was perceived as an obstacle can now be seen as preparation. If volleyball is a dream pursuit I may find it necessary to take care of school, even if I dislike school. If I can't maintain my grades then I can no longer play volleyball and my dream pursuit is lost. If I take care of school and other factors I can continue to pursue my dream. If I simply enjoy volleyball, then school may have no meaning. I might pay little attention to school. I can have a number of flow experiences while playing volleyball without contributing to other aspects of my life. In both cases I experience flow. In both I contribute to my quality of life by living in the moment, however, the pursuit of a dream allows me to bring meaning to many aspects of my life and in this way to have more daily quality experiences. The more quality experiences I have the more likely I will feel I have a high quality of life.

A supportive example from the text can be seen through the character Pete. Pete's meaningful dream pursuit was playing university soccer. The pursuit of this activity helped him to find meaning in school. He came to university to play soccer but soon realized that he had to maintain his standing in school or he wouldn't be able to play soccer for the university. He tried to ensure that his school work was organized and completed so he could continue playing. He mentioned that if he was no longer playing soccer he would not have an interest in staying in school.

The pursuit of meaningful activities, or a dream, may contribute to a sense of balance. Pursuing meaningful activities may force us to recognize other important dimensions of our lives in order to free energy for our dream pursuits. Paying attention to other aspects of our lives should create some sense of balance. Covey (1994) has stated that balance is a key to quality of life. Balance, according to Covey, is to have energy devoted equally between the four spheres of physical, mental, spiritual, and social dimensions of being. If these four spheres are attended to then we have balance and

therefore, a high quality of life. When I first began this study I felt that quality of life must be related to Covey's ideas on balance. I felt that each of these areas had to be equally addressed in order for quality of life to exist. However, seeking balance in and of itself may not be key to experiencing a high quality of life. If we examine the experiences of the typical middle class we may find examples of Covey's sense of balance. People are paying more attention to various aspects of living. Work, friendships, family, leisure activities, and fitness pursuits, to name a few, are given fairly equal attention. People have more time for leisure pursuits while working less than ever before yet, in our culture a sense of unhappiness seems to exist within the middle class. People seem to have a fairly balanced life but they are still unhappy. There is a sense that something is missing. That which is missing is meaning. What is the dream they are pursuing? What gives meaning to their activities? As we can see, a sense of balance without meaning is relatively unimportant.

One of the study participants made some interesting comments that spurred my thinking about my conceptions of quality of life. This participant suggested that balance was important to quality of life but that all aspects of living were not necessarily in equal parts. The university athlete is pulled in many directions. The demands of school, sport, friends, and family can be overwhelming. Paying equal attention to each is almost impossible, yet many university athletes seem to be very happy. It was suggested that one aspect of living might be more important than another, for example, the university athlete might be more focused on sport than school. This was fine as long as the other aspects of life could balance out the dominant pursuit. If these other aspects of life could be balanced and maintained then the primary interest could be functionally pursued and quality of life would remain high. If, however, the other aspects of life became too demanding then the primary pursuit would be affected and the entire system would be out of balance. An analogy was made to a three point balance. A typical balance occurs with a fulcrum and two equally weighted and lengthed parts on either end. The "skier balance" on the other hand has three or more points. The head would be the primary

point, the legs and arms would be secondary points of balance. Most of the weight is in the head and the rest of the weight is distributed evenly within the limbs of the skier. For the athlete, sport may be analogous to the head of the skier. Most of the weight or focus is placed on the head. The limbs consist of social relationships, school, and other commitments. If sport is the primary concern the model will stay in balance as long as the other aspects are equally maintained. If one of the other aspects becomes too large one of the limbs of the model becomes heavy and the skier, like the athlete, is no longer in balance. As long as secondary and tertiary aspects of life can balance the primary focus, the individual can live with quality, no matter how little attention is devoted to the non-primary aspects.

This example is also significant as aspects of the model that aren't maintained will take away from the experience of the primary focus. For example, if I am primarily concerned with playing volleyball, but I devote too much of my energy into social activities and not enough into school work my primary objective suffers. If, however, I can place enough work into relationships and school in a balanced fashion I can reserve most of my time and energy to devote to my sport. In this way I can spend more time on certain aspects of life than others and still maintain a sense of balance, thus a good quality of life.

A good example from the text was Clayton's choice to go out for his friend's birthday. Clayton felt he had to work on some assignments as he knew he had little time before they were due. He was also tired from the intensity of recent training the coach was using with the team. Ultimately he chose to go out. The next day Clayton missed a class when he fell asleep in the library. He had created a situation where he had even less time to complete his assignments. If he had focused a little more of his energy on school work at that time and less on socializing he would have maintained a sense of balance. However, by spending more time in social activities and less than he needed in school work, he ended up throwing everything slightly out of balance.

Danny's focus on getting back into playing form before too much of the soccer

season had taken place provides another illustration. He needed to continue daily physiotherapy in order to get back into the line up, but he had to miss classes to go to therapy. He chose to skip classes and focused on his desire to play. Danny's actions exemplified a lack of balance and being too focused on a single dimension of being. The end result for Danny was that his school work suffered and he aggravated his injury due to his desire to get back into playing form too soon. The most important aspect of his life, playing soccer, suffered from his inability to maintain a sense of balance in other aspects of his life.

Balance should also be looked upon as a dynamic concept. Within any system, constant adjustments are needed in order to maintain a sense of equilibrium. Balance cannot mean that persons will always devote 25% of their energies to one activity, 15% in another pursuit and so on, rather, priorities may need to change. In the example of the university athlete, certain times of the year may require more effort devoted to school as opposed to sport. If these adjustments are not made the pursuit of the primary objective, in this case sport, may be jeopardized. The characters Ross and Clayton discussed the importance of studying versus attending a practice during exam week. These athletes, normally focused on sport, needed to devote more energy toward studying as exams drew closer. This was one point in the year where it was important to switch priorities. It was interesting that the coach made it difficult for the athletes to devote time toward this shift in priorities and energies.

Certainly each of us has been exposed to people, athletes included, that have become singularly focused to the point of obsession. In particular with athletes, these people are left in a state of depression and uncertainty when their career is over. They have been so consumed that they have failed to develop and maintain other dimensions of their life. It was interesting that the athletes interviewed for this project have had a very positive experience. Although it was not the point of this paper to make generalizations, I think the Canadian University system promotes a positive experience. The emphasis on both sport and school helps these athletes develop multiple aspects of their person and

maintain a balanced perspective in the pursuit of their dreams.

Important to any discussion of quality of life is the notion of freedom. Freedom is a very complex idea and my examination of this concept will be cursory at best. My ideas on the relation of quality of life and freedom are at the mere beginnings of forming. At this stage I am merely trying to highlight the importance of freedom in relation to quality of life. Without freedom of thought and action, whether perceived or real, it is difficult to experience a high quality of life.

Freedom exists at many levels. We may have freedom from disease, injury or persecution. There is also freedom to pursue ideas, to create, to take action. Some aspects of freedom may be beyond our control. I may want to become a skier but if I live in an area that lacks snow I am somewhat limited in my ability to ski. My freedom is restricted because of the lack of snow, however I can take different courses of action that exercise my freedom. Perhaps I can try dryland training, or ski on grass, or move to an area that has snow.

Sport is an interesting phenomenon in that it paradoxically invites freedom while simultaneously restraining it. Freedom can exist even in the presence of barriers. Coaches restrict our behaviours, we are limited by the rules of the game and the abilities of our fellow players. To illustrate, the characters Ross and Clayton were prohibited by the coach from participating in certain activities over the holidays. Freedom was further restricted when practice was held on January 1st to prevent too much partying on New Year's Eve. This is but one of many examples from the text. The soccer team was forced to take a walk at 7:30 in the morning when they did not have to play until 2:00 in the afternoon. The constant time restrictions imposed on the athletes between school, practice, training, and games is another reminder of the inhibition of freedom. Yet for these university athletes, the restrictions of sport involvement seem to slip away during the moment of play. The game and game-like situations seem to be where the greatest amount of freedom is experienced. We may be restrained by the boundaries of the game and the restricitions surrounding the sport with school, training and coach demands, but

we are free to explore our potentials as fully as possible during the moment of play. There seems to be a sense of control that exists during play. For athletes in particular the moment of play allows them to continue in light of all other obstacles. The joy and freedom they experience while playing makes practice, training, school and other commitments worthwhile.

Freedom enables us to experience flow, meaning, and balance. We cannot experience flow without the freedom to engage our abilities. We cannot engage in meaningful pursuits if we feel restricted in our thinking or actions. We certainly cannot experience balance without the freedom to set priorities or make change.

Each of these concepts: flow, meaning (dream), balance and freedom are significant to quality of life. Independently each of these factors may contribute to quality of life, however these factors are intimately connected and most influential in conjunction with each other. I mentioned quality of life as being an impression of multiple experiences. The more high quality experiences an individual has the better the impression they have of quality of life. If these factors work together I think it more likely that quality experiences will occur in many aspects of living. It is my sense that these factors are interdependent. If I experience flow, but have no meaningful pursuits my quality of life is not likely as high as it could be. The pursuit of meaningful activities helps create a sense of purpose in many areas of life without which balance, flow and meaning are less influential. Balance may exist, but if our pursuits do not provide meaning, if we don't have freedom, or if we aren't experiencing flow then we are unlikely to feel that we are living a quality life. Freedom allows us to pursue meaningful activities, create balance, and experience flow. I'm not sure of the relationship between these factors, but I see them as being highly interdependent. One cannot exist in significant quality without the others.

A final word on quality of life. Like many things it is not a constant. It takes place on a continuum and is subject to many changes. Our quality of life at one point may be exceptional, at others atrocious. What is significant about quality of life is our

power to change it.

Future Journeys

I think that a significant contribution research can make is that it raises important questions and considerations of future avenues of exploration. Considering the richness of data from this study and the current controversy surrounding the direction of Canadian university athletics, the potential and need for further research in this area is tremendous. Consequently, I propose the following recommendations for future research projects:

1. Studies are needed to assess athletes' conceptions of quality of life. What is it? When do they experience it? How do they achieve it? Further questions might include: Does physical activity play a role in the balance in your life? How does physical activity create balance? How does it create an imbalance? Does physical activity improve your life? How is physical activity experienced as improving your life? How is physical activity experienced as detracting from your life? Does physical activity relate to the quality of your life? How is physical activity experienced as enhancing quality of life? How is physical activity experienced as reducing quality of life?
2. Further phenomenological studies are needed to examine the experiences of the university athlete. These studies can address the lack of research reflecting the voice of the athlete. These types of studies may be useful in light of the changing face of Canadian university athletics.
3. Phenomenological studies would also be useful in examining the experiences of people involved in physical activity domains outside of the university setting. These domains might include recreational activity participants, youth sport, physical education classes, exercise participants.
4. Phenomenological studies can also be conducted to see how athletes deal with specific situations. These studies might examine in greater detail the experience of being injured, the experience of competition, and the relationship between coaches and athletes.
5. Critical action research needs to be conducted helping coaches to facilitate higher quality of life experiences for athletes. This kind of research might involve critical

reflection.

6. Conceptual research could examine the connection of flow, meaning, balance and freedom.

Some Final Thoughts

I have tried to create a sense of the lifeworld of the university athlete. However, it is my hope that the scope of this study reaches beyond our understanding of the university athlete's experience. At some level, we have all experienced sport in our lives. We have all been champions and the defeated in the realm of sport and other areas of life. I hope this research helps us to see the complexity of our experiences and in so doing can help us try to live with a sense of wonder and act with compassion.

I have also come to realize that my own struggle to live a quality life is not in vain. I have learned a great deal about myself and others through the exploration of this project. The process of writing has helped me to see the connections among topics of personal interest where I formerly saw no connection.

Where do I go from here? This project has reaffirmed my desire to understand life experiences and to help people improve their lives. Engaging in this project has helped me realize that I enjoy learning and writing about human experience. I hope to continue working as a writer and a researcher in the pursuit of understanding what it is to be human.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of this project has been in the act of completion. It is time to move on, to examine new questions. I close knowing more than when I started and yet, having more questions than answers, but I am satisfied. It is through the struggle to learn, the process of doing that we grow and find meaning. My search continues.

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Appendix
Informed Consent Form
"Quality of Life and the Experience of Physical Activity in University Sport"

Principal Investigator: Kim Senecal
Faculty of Physical Education & Recreation
University of Alberta
433-4520

Billy Strean (advisor)
Faculty of Physical Education & Recreation
University of Alberta
492- 3890

The purpose of this study is to understand and describe how experiences of physical activity are related to perceptions of quality of life. I will be asked to engage in one or more interviews to discuss my ideas and experiences. I understand that these interviews will be audio-taped and then transcribed. I understand that if the competitive season permits, I will also be observed during practices and games. The audio tapes will be used for research purposes only. When the tapes are no longer required for research purposes, they will be erased. I understand that I will spend approximately one hour in an initial interview. If I wish to continue my involvement, I agree to participate in up to 3 more interviews for a maximum time commitment of approximately 4 hours. The time and place of interviews will be determined at my convenience.

My identity will be kept confidential. Only the principal investigator will have access to the tapes and documents associated with this study. Any written report will not include actual names and identifying details will be altered or omitted to protect identities. All tapes will remain in a secure location and will only be used for research purposes.

In order to ensure I understand exactly what to expect from participation in this study, the principal researcher will be happy to answer any questions I may have. If for any reason at all I do not want to participate in this study, or if I decide to end my involvement at any time, I am assured that there will be no negative consequences.
By signing this form, I agree to
1. Participating in an initial interview
2. Having interviews audio-taped
3. Observation during practices and/or games
4. With mutual agreement and interest, one or more additional interviews

Signature of consent to participate in the research project and acknowledgement that you have received a copy of this consent form

_____ Date _____

Investigator _____